FIDDLER'S LUCK

ROBERT HAVEN
SCHAUFFLER

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THE GAY ADVENTURES OF A MUSICAL AMATEUR

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BY

ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER

Author of "The Musical Amateur," "Scum o' the Earth, and Other Poems," etc.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1920

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TO
THE SEVENTY-NINTH DIVISION, A.E.F.
THE MARS HOSPITAL CENTER
AND
MAJORS JOHN McCLELLAN
AND
SAMUEL CRAIG PLUMMER
THIS STORY IS
DEDICATED

FOREWORD

THE story which follows was told me by a particular friend of mine, in fact, by a brother fiddler errant, during a series of evenings after he came back from the Great War. Now do not be alarmed, gentle reader. It is not a war novel. I shall not give you a single description of how the hero captured seven machine-gun nests single-handed or crawled under the electrified prison fence. If anybody finds more than 2.75 per cent of war stuff in the following pages, let him hastily bang the cover to and write me a threatening letter, and I will take up with the extremely honorable house of Houghton Mifflin the question of giving him his money back. I can't say fairer than that, can I?

As my friend was a brother writer and did not wish his identity discovered by those who knew his style at sight, he decided to tell me the tale and let me deal with it in my own peculiar fashion.

So far as his musical adventures go, I am prepared to vouch for their faithfulness, in the main, to fact. But as for the love parts of the story, I shall have to leave the question of their literal verity to be threshed out between my fiddler errant and his Maker. I can only remind the reader what the reviewers of his books sometimes say of him: that he is "a dreamer and an idealist." And who ever saw a vagabond fiddler of that description allowing himself to be shackled by abject slavery to gross fact in telling a love story?

A few paragraphs near the beginning were borrowed from my book, *The Musical Amateur*, and shattered to bits, and then "remoulded nearer to the heart's desire." Chapter XIII originally appeared in the *Outlook*, and eleven of the remaining nineteen chapters, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, but in forms which detached them from the main current of this story, and made them self-supporting and able to fend for themselves in a cold, hard world, as yet unaware of their future context.

R. H. S.

CONTENTS

I. I Find a 'Cello in the Attic 1

II. I Make Progress in Fiddler's Magic 19

III. The Lady or the 'Cello? 29

IV. Fiddlers Errant 43

V. I Fiddle Duets with the Trump of War 65

VI. Plattsburg Deals with the Muses 75

VII. The Regiment Buys me a 'Cello 84

VIII. I Mislay the Band 95

IX. Fiddler's Magic 109

X. The "Atlantic" Supplies me with Tooth-Paste 122

XI. Hobbles with a 'Cello 143

XII. When in Paris — 157

XIII. Inter-Allied Fiddlesticks 170

XIV. Love Duet with Obligato 186

XV. My Bow Saves Egypt 196

XVI. Un Moment d'Amour 215

XVII. A Modern Nero 223

XVIII. I Bunk with the Strad 232

XIX. The Fall of Fort Beethoven 251

XX. A Duet for Life 261

FIDDLER'S LUCK

⁂

CHAPTER I

I FIND A 'CELLO IN THE ATTIC

I SEEM to have been predestined for a life of musical adventure. But, at the start, I was handicapped by the nature of my means of self-expression. I was born, not with a silver spoon, but with a flute at my mouth. This was my family's chief hereditary vehicle of music. It had been handed down the line from age to age along with the torch of life; so I clutched and tootled it unquestioningly until the age of fifteen, and thought it the divinest of instruments. Little did I suspect how barren that prosaic tube was in possibilities of romance.

Then, one morning, I stumbled upon a dusty 'cello in the attic. The look of the thing interested and puzzled me strangely. It called to my blood; why, I knew not, though I learned later that this was the big fiddle that my most talented grandparent, a mighty amateur flutist, had embraced and learned to play "deep stuff" on at the age of sixty-three.

I had no earthly idea whether the thing should be tuned in thirds or sevenths. From previous desultory observation I just barely recalled that the right hand wielded the bow. But I knew nothing about an end-pin, and let the wretched instrument squat ignominiously on the floor while I made vain attempts to apply the bow to the strings without whitening both my trouser knees with resin.

At an opportune moment I discovered an instruction book which threw light on these points. It did far more. It disgorged a long strip of printed paper which, when pasted under the strings, promised a short-cut to mastery by pointing out exactly where to put each finger. A few tentative experiments, and I fell devoted slave to this strange mechanism. Old things were passed away, and, behold! all things had become new. No longer did the flute have complete dominion over me.

It was a transition period during which I resembled the character of "Joy" in Collins's ode on "The Passions," who —

"First to the lively pipe his hand addrest,
But soon he saw the brisk, awakening viol
Whose sweet entrancing voice he loved the best."

From then on I never had a dull moment. No sooner had I turned my back upon the humdrum flute and embraced the romance-compelling fiddle, than things began happening thick and fast in a hitherto uneventful life. For musical adventures depend largely on the instrument you play. Go traveling with a bassoon or an alto horn packed in your bag and romance will pass you by. Far otherwise will events shape themselves if you start on your wanderings with a fiddle.

I found that to sally forth upon the broad highway with a 'cello couchant under my arm, like a lance of the days of chivalry, was to invite adventure. I compelled Providence to make things interesting for me up to the moment when I returned home and stood my fat, melodious comrade in the corner on his one leg — like the stork, that other purveyor of agreeable surprises.

I found that one reason why the 'cellist is particularly liable to meet with these adventures is because the nature of his talent is so plainly visible. The parcel under his arm labels him FIDDLER in larger scare-caps than Mr. Hearst has ever yet used for head-lines. It is seen of men. There is no concealment possible. For it would, indeed, be less practicable to hide your 'cello under a bushel than to hide a bushel under your 'cello. Its non-reducible obesity is apt to bring on incidents of all sorts: annoying sometimes, as when urchins recognize it as a heaven-sent target for snowballs; absurd sometimes, as when the ticket-chopper in the subway bars your path under the misapprehension that it is a double-bass, or when the small boys at the exit offer you a paper in return for "a tune on that there banjo!" But more often the incidents are pleasant, as when your bulky trade-mark enables some kindred spirit to recognize you as the comrade destined by fate to accompany him on impromptu adventures in music.

At first I was almost painfully aware of the conspicuousness of my 'cello, because I was abandoning for it an instrument so retiring by nature that you might carry it till death in your side pocket, yet never have it contribute an unusual episode to your career. But I soon found that the advantages far outweighed the discomforts. For, from the moment when I discovered the exaggerated old fiddle in the attic, slumbering in its black coffin, and wondered what it was all about, and brought it resurrection and life — the adventures, as I have said, began. I have never known exactly what was the magic inherent in the dull, guttural, discouraged protests of the strings which I experimentally plucked that day. But their songs-without-words-or-music seemed to me pregnant with promises of beauty and romance far beyond the ken of the forthright flute. So then and there I decided to embark upon the delicate and dangerous enterprise of thoroughly learning another instrument.

It was indeed delicate and dangerous because it had to be prosecuted as secretly as sketching hostile fortifications. Father must not suspect. I feared that if he heard the demonic groans of a G string in pain, or the ghoulish whimperings of a manhandled A, he would mount to the attic, throw back his head, look down upon me through those lower crescents of his spectacles which always made him look a trifle unsympathetic, and pronounce that baleful formula: "My son, come into my study!" For I knew he labored under the delusion that I already "blew in" too much time on the flute, away from the companionship of All Gaul and Q.E.D. As for any additional instrument, I feared that he would reduce it to a pulp at sight, and me too.

My first secret step was to paste the long strip of paper upon the finger-board under the strings. It was pockmarked with black dots and letters, so that if the music told you to play the note G, all you had to do was to contort your neck properly and remove your left hand from the path of vision, then gaze cross-eyed and upside down at the finger-board until you discovered the particular dot labeled G. The next move was to clap a finger-tip upon that dot and straighten your neck and eyes and apply the bow. Then out would come a triumphant G; that is, provided your fingers had not already rubbed G's characteristically undershot lip so much as to erase away the letter's individuality. In that case, to be sure, your striving for G might result only in C after all.

It was fascinating work, though. And every afternoon as the hour of four, and father's "constitutional," approached, I would "get set" like a sprinter on my mark in the upper hall. The moment the front door closed definitively behind my parent I would dash for the attic and commence my eye, neck, and finger contortions. It was dangerous work, too. For it was so hard to stop betimes that one evening father made my blood run cold by inquiring, "What were you moaning about upstairs before dinner?" I fear that I attributed these sounds to travail in Latin scholarship, and an alleged sympathy for the struggles of the dying Gaul.

The paper finger-board was so efficacious that soon I felt fit to taste the first fruits of toil. A week of furtive practice convinced me that I could already play the 'cello, though I now remember grasping the bow like a tennis-racquet and the finger-board like a trolley-strap. I found one of those jolly trios which the paternal composer Cornelius Gurlitt so obligingly wrote in notes of one syllable, smuggled the 'cello out of the house, to be returned by the back stairs after dark, foregathered with a couple of schoolmates — a brother and sister who played the violin and piano — and was thrilled for the first time in my life by the golden electric current of fiddler's magic.

Now, the amateur's appreciation of music is apt to keep step with the character of the instrument he happens to play, and with his proficiency thereupon. So my very first scrapings and stammerings upon the 'cello prepared me to be delighted with pieces whose juvenile simplicity I, as a flexile flutist, would have laughed to scorn.

No effect of the sophisticated concert stage has ever enthralled me more than that first chord of ours, when I heard the 'cello tone mingle deliciously with the piano and violin tones, and realized that my bow had made such blending possible. The flute notes had never really mixed with others, but had stood apart by themselves, crystalline, cold, aloof; and perhaps my nature had taken its cue from the flute. But that first trio venture changed everything. There first I tasted the delights of real harmony — and developed a deep devotion for Priscilla, the little girl who played the piano. Along with musical democracy and puppy-love, the 'cello came into my life. Heralded so impressively, no wonder it tangled its strings among those of my young heart.

Priscilla was a white-skinned, stocky young person with large blue eyes, a thick blond pigtail, and well-developed arms. She may not have been able to make the piano talk, but she could undoubtedly cause it to shout. Her brother and I had to saw away vigorously to make our fiddles heard above the din, but we enjoyed ourselves all the more for that. We were in that primitive stage of musical evolution where the louder a piece sounds, the more exciting it is; and the more exciting it was, the more we all enjoyed ourselves.

I wanted that afternoon never to end. When all three of us had stopped from sheer exhaustion, I rose to tear myself away. Then a wonderful idea came to me. At least I might prolong the rapture of Priscilla's society, if not of the music. So I blushingly invited her down to the corner drug-store for an ice-cream soda, alleging with justice that playing so hard makes one thirsty.

We walked home very slowly and a long way around, and talked about what an inspired composer Gurlitt was and what great musicians we were going to be when we grew up. She had the most graceful way in the world of swinging her arms and holding her fingers arched ever so little outward. As we strolled through the dusky park my hand touched hers, and I felt a shock as if I had brushed against the sponges of the patent electric battery which "The Youth's Companion" had just sent me as a premium for securing new subscriptions,—but ever so much more agreeable.

A moment later it happened again. This time it seemed as if our hands could n't come apart, just as you can't let go the sponges when the current of the battery is on full strength. I did n't dare look at her, but pulled my hand away as soon as ever I could, and took her straight home and hardly could find voice enough to mumble good-bye.

But I lay awake in my bed till after midnight, all a-tingle with the most delicious sensations. I was in love with Priscilla! Joy and bliss! But would she be "mad" at me for having held her hand like that? Would she stop our rehearsals and never take any more walks? Abomination of desolation! Thus I alternated between the crest and trough of the wave until I fell asleep.

We grown-ups are apt to smile condescendingly over the puny little loves of childhood and adolescence. I have come to believe that this sort of sneering is almost sacrilege. I believe that a cut finger or a smashed doll may mean, at the moment, as great suffering for the child as a major operation or the loss of a fortune may mean to us grown-ups; and that one of these so-called puppy-love affairs may be as ecstatic and terrific and all-absorbing for adolescence as the loves of Tristan and Isolde are for maturity.

Such was my inner tumult the following day that, as I stood waiting on the corner to see whether Priscilla would walk home from school with me or not, I felt much the same relative anxiety as a grown man might suffer in the act of proposing to Helen of Troy.

When at last she actually appeared around the bend and smiled brilliantly and waved her graceful hand at me, I ascended to the top story of a heaven higher than the highest skyscraper in town.

That afternoon we played louder and more excitedly than ever. I had the feeling that I was telling her things with my bow that I would probably never dare tell her with my lips. She heard them, too, for once when Bill, her brother, was not looking, she flashed me a glance so full of comprehension and sympathy that I could feel it clear to the back of my head and then all the way down my spine. It was queer how Priscilla always made me think of that electric battery.

When we had played the last note we were thirstier than ever; but we both gulped down our sacramental ice-cream sodas, and hastened toward the park. And when we got there — I do not know how I ever found the nerve to do it, but that look of Priscilla's had made me drunk, I think — I took her hand boldly and put it to my lips.

How I ever came to do that particular thing I do not know. Such acts of homage were not common in the school we attended. It was an instinctive gesture of adoration. Priscilla made one half-hearted effort to pull it away — that adorable, scratched little hand! And then, with a frightened look, she let me have it. Nay, more, I could feel it tightening frankly around my own small, ravished fingers.

When I found how wonderful it tasted and felt, and that it was returning my pressure, I was filled with a strange recklessness. I put my arms around her and, mustering all my faculties — kissed her, very reverentially on the forehead.

I do not remember that we said much for a while. We were both a little shy of what we had done. But that must have been taken as proposal and acceptance on both sides, for soon we sat down close together on a bench, and stayed there until it was quite dark, telling each other what we would do as soon as we grew up and were married.

We would go abroad and study music together under the best masters and become great artists and tour the world to the astonishment and rapture of mankind. And some of the millions we made should be sent to Cornelius Gurlitt as a present in gratitude for his having written such music that, bathed in the magic of its strains, we had been enabled to discover our love for one another. And soon we would play trios in public, here in this very town!

This much we really did achieve. Borne on the wings of love, our rehearsals went so brilliantly that we resolved on a public performance in a few days at the High School. Alas! if I had only taken the supposed rapidity of my progress in learning the 'cello upstairs, with a grain of attic salt! But my only worry was over the problem how to smuggle the too conspicuous instrument to school on the morning of the concert, without the knowledge of a vigilant father. I did not feel that as yet it was safe to make him my confidant, either in music or love.

We decided at last that any such smuggling attempt would be nothing less than suicidal rashness. So I borrowed another boy's father's 'cello and, in default of the printed strip, I penciled under the strings notes of the whereabouts of G, C, and so forth, making G shoot out the lip with extra decision.

Our public performance was a *succès fou* — that is, it was a *succès* up to a certain point, and *fou* beyond it, when one disaster followed another. My fingers played so hard as to erase G's lower lip. They quite obliterated A, turned E into F, and B into a fair imitation of D. These involuntary revisions led me to introduce the very boldest modern harmonies into one of the most naïvely traditional strains of Cornelius Gurlitt.

Now, in the practice of the art of music one never with impunity pours new harmonic wine into old bottles. The thing is simply not done. Perhaps, though, we might have muddled through somehow, had not my violinist brother-in-law elect poked me cruelly in the ribs with his bow during a rest, and exclaimed in a coarse stage whisper:

"Look who's there!"

I looked, and gave a gasp. It might have passed for an excellent rehearsal of my last gasp. In the very front row sat — father! He appeared sardonic and business-like. The fatal formula seemed already to be trembling upon his lips.

The remnants of B, C, D and so forth suddenly blurred before my crossed eyes. With the most dismal report our old bottle of chamber music blew up, and I fled from the scene. The last things I saw were Priscilla's large blue eyes, in the depths of which sympathy struggled with bitter reproach.

"My son, come into my study!"

In an ague I had waited half the evening for those dreaded words; and with laggard step and miserable forebodings I followed across the hall. But the day was destined to end in still another surprise. When father finally faced me in that awful sanctum, he was actually smiling in the jolliest manner, and I divined that the rod was going to be spared.

"What's all this?" he inquired. "Thought you'd surprise your old dad, eh? Come, tell me about it."

So I told him about it; and he was so sympathetic that I found courage for the great request.

"F-F-Father," I stammered, "sometimes I think p'r'aps I don't hold the bow just right. It scratches so. Please might I take just four lessons from a regular teacher so I could learn all about how to play the 'cello? It's lots more fun than the flute."

Father choked a little. But he looked jollier than ever as he replied, "Yes, my son, on condition that you promise to lay the flute entirely aside until you have learned *all* about how to play the 'cello."

I promised.

I have faithfully kept that promise.

CHAPTER II

I MAKE PROGRESS IN FIDDLER'S MAGIC

ON the street corner after school next day, I had another bad quarter of an hour. What would Priscilla say? Would she be "mad" because I had made a fool of myself and us at the concert?

I never should have doubted her. She came along with that walk of hers which just seemed to float and only touch the ground sometimes, the way a soap-bubble with rainbows on it floats over the rug when you blow it. As soon as she caught sight of me she smiled and waved, and acted just as though we had never tried to play in public at all. She began to talk away at a great rate about anything and everything except the concert. And once in a while the backs of our hands would touch.

Hers felt so delicious that it brought a lump into my throat to think what I'd done to her before everybody, making her ridiculous that way. I began to stammer out apologies the best I knew how. Priscilla would not let me go on. She was only just my own age. But that afternoon there was something about her which reminded me of a long time ago, before mother died, and how good she used to be to me when I had fallen down and bumped my head, or hit my thumb hard with the hammer.

"Never mind explaining," she said tactfully. "*I* know you'd have played *beautifully*, if — if — why, I'd have done just the same if I'd been surprised that way. Maybe you have what they call the artistic temperament. Mother says some folks do. And, anyway, there is n't another boy in school could have taught himself that much without his father knowing."

Things had turned out well after all. I poured out to Priscilla that father had not minded at all and had promised instead that I might take four lessons from a real teacher so as to learn all the ins and outs of 'cello playing. And that opened up such pleasant glimpses along into the future that we forgot for quite a few minutes the fact that we had arranged to marry each other some day, or even that we were boy and girl.

We discussed the brilliant careers we had mapped out for ourselves when we had learned to perform even better than at present. By the time we reached her door I had described to her a complete tour of the globe wherein we astonished the natives of all lands with incomparable duets for 'cello and piano.

The selection of my teacher hung fire for a couple of weeks, during which time I went on playing Gurlitt trios with Priscilla and Bill and imagining myself almost a master of the 'cello and falling deeper and deeper under the spell of Priscilla.

How differently would life have turned out if I had not had the deplorable habit of talking in my sleep! My bed was in the same room as father's, and one morning I awoke to find him bending over me and asking:

"What's all this about marrying Priscilla?"

My presence of mind had not yet waked up along with the rest of me, and I found myself blurting out the whole story of how much I loved the lady of my dreams and how we were soon to tour the world together. I may have given father the impression that the bridal was to take place in a year at most.

Father looked thoughtful and said nothing. But the next day he handed me a telegram from my wonderful big cousin Walthers out in Illinois, which said:

"Come on quick for long visit. Bring doghouse. Wire me train you take."

Now Walthers was old and big enough to be my oldest brother. But he was about the best fun of anybody I had ever known. And in the light of my present enthusiasm for fiddling, despite his calling my precious 'cello a "doghouse," a visit to him seemed like a visit to paradise. For Walthers was a passionate amateur violinist, with a large and benign tolerance for those who did not play as well as he did.

I am afraid that, for a time, Priscilla faded somewhat into the background, or at least into the middle distance, of my consciousness. After all, why could not she come out to Illinois to visit Walthers? There was such a rush in packing up and making the train that there was not even time to tell her good-bye. I could only scribble an excited letter of farewell in the trolley car and post it at the station. I wrote that no earthly event, no matter how jolly, could ever alter my undying love for her. And I meant it.

At Walthers's I plunged into an intensely musical atmosphere. But at the very outset I had a severe shock. For I learned what real grown-up chamber music was. Gurlitt and his crew fell from my eyes like scales and revealed the next phase of musical enjoyment. The conviction was born that once I could hold down a part in the trios of Gade or the string quartets of Rubinstein I might be gathered contentedly to my fathers without more ado; I would have warmed both hands before the fire of life, and could then anticipate nothing but carrying out the ashes.

With this incentive I found a 'cello teacher and unlearned the tennis-racquet and trolley-strap method with groanings which cannot be uttered here; while ambition was kept alive and in vigorous health by my cousin's nightly orgies of chamber music with players more accomplished than I.

Finally the dreamed-of moment came. I was permitted to try my hand. The others suffered uncomplainingly. As for me, from then on, life held a gluttonous measure of unalloyed bliss. The delights of that performance could not have been more thrilling to me if, with true Orphic cunning, my "dog-house" had caused the dining-table to rustle its leaves and the cat to perform on the hearth-rug the dance of the seven veils. I could play the lovely notes — most of them — loud and clear. What more does the hardened amateur demand from life? For the second time I supposed myself a master, and was ready to sing my *Nunc dimittis* — and to practice cheerfully three hours a day.

Then I was taken to hear a professional

string quartet. The flame of mere sound and fury set for me. The Kneisels and the Flonzaleys with the host of heaven came. And lo! creation widened in my view. With amazement I began slowly to realize the subtle potentialities of tone-color and the delicate fascinations of dynamic-color.

I had always naïvely thought of the expressions "loud" and "soft" in much the same way that the early Puritans used to think of "evil" and "good." They were like two neighboring squares of a checker-board, one dead black, the other snow white, with the sharpest possible line of separation. For the Puritans a thing was either absolutely bad or absolutely good; there was nothing good in parts like the famous curate's egg. Thus, to my juvenile mind, music had been either loud or soft — principally the former. Now it began to appear that there were as many kinds of loud and soft as there were shades in the rainbow between red and purple. And the line between the two was scarcely more clear-cut than the line between the yolk and the white of the curate's egg would be if it were beaten up into an omelet.

It dawned on me that to most young amateurs *pianissimo* was an almost meaningless expression. And I began to consider that musical self-assertiveness almost indecent which fiddles away forever with a noise like the sound of many waters; and to wonder why, when the average fiddler meets with the sign *sfp* under his part, he is apt to look so much harder at the *f* than at the *p*.

My heart leaped up in response to the teamwork of those four professional bows with but a single thought, and to the technic that was such a matter of course that it never revealed itself, or the disillusionizing fact that the insides of a sheep were being tickled by the resined tail of a horse. Here, at last, to set final bounds for my aspiration, was the authentic oracle of Apollo — and the practice hours aspired accordingly from three to six.

Of course, after those first few enthusiastic and uncritical years of dalliance with the royal sport of chamber music, I found myself becoming less and less easily enthralled. My musical palate grew more discriminating. It takes a Brahms or a Franck to-day to brim the cup of joy which a Raff or a Rubinstein then sweetly overflowed. As for those garbled symphonies and operas — the transcriptions at which I once fiddled away so happily and in such good faith — I brand them now as "derangements" and had as lief perform "The Messiah" on a Jew's-harp.

Nevertheless, as I look back through the mists of the Great War to that time, three significant facts emerge. In the first place, it is clear that I never would have persevered in all that painful practice without the weekly reward of "virtuosity" when, every Saturday afternoon, little Miss Second Violin and dear big Mr. Viola came from town and were rushed out of their overcoats, and had their hands warmed with jubilant massage, and then were plumped down before the B flat Mozart quartet and hardly allowed time for even the most reasonable preliminary caterwaulings before Walthers's firm command came, "No antemortems!" and his "one-two" detonated, and at last we were outward-bound for fairy-land.

Yet even that reward — agreeable as it was — would scarcely have kept me so long on the rack of the thumb-positions, or doubled up in the chromatic treadmill of finger exercises, had it not been for the "far-off, divine event" symbolized by opus 59[1] gleaming alluringly, far within the enchanted castle of fiddler's magic. No, there is nothing like a taste of chamber music to make the idle apprentice industrious. It is the authentic magic — the kindly light that has the power to lead him o'er musical moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the dusk of mere finger-twiddling merges into the dawn of attainment.

To me the reward of industry was soon to come. I was rapidly qualifying for the practice of that most delightful of all sports, fiddler's errantry.

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[1] Beethoven's three string quartets, opus 59, are usually regarded by amateur fiddlers as their extreme ideal limit of difficulty and of delight.

CHAPTER III

THE LADY OR THE 'CELLO?

I SCARCELY know whence I inherited my errant streak. I never heard of any tramps, troubadours, gypsies, or buccaneers lurking in the dense foliage of the family tree. Perhaps my passion for vagabond adventure is the obverse of that instinct which led so many of my ancestors to go into all lands without purse or scrip as foreign missionaries. At any rate, before I had been a year under Walthers's roof I felt the urge of the musical vagabond seething mightily within me. I dreamed long delicious day-dreams wherein I figured heroically as a Robin Hood of the 'cello. If wishes were adventures, I would already have become a fiddler errant.

Now, aspiring fiddlers errant, especially when young, are apt to rush in and occupy the centers of stages where angels in good and regular four-hours-a-day practice fear to tread, let alone tune up. One of my early vagaries was a passion for playing with those of my elders and betters who were too good for me.

Not long after discovering, to my keen disappointment, that I would need more than four lessons to learn quite all there was to know about the 'cello — in fact, just nine months after discovering the coffin in the attic — I "rushed in." Hearing that "The Messiah" was to be given at Christmas, I approached the conductor of the orchestra and magniloquently informed him that I was a 'cellist and that I would contribute my services without money and without price to the coming performance.

With a rather dubious air my terms were accepted. That same evening at rehearsal I found that the entire bass section of the orchestra consisted of three 'cellos. These were presided over by an inaudible, and therefore negligible, little girl, a hoary sage who always arrived very late and left very early, and myself. I shall never forget my sensations when the sage, at a crucial point, suddenly packed up and left me, an undeveloped musical Atlas, to bear the entire weight of the orchestra on one pair of puny shoulders. Under these conditions it was a memorable ordeal to read at sight "The Trumpet Shall Sound." The trumpet sounded, indeed. That was more than the 'cello did in certain passages! As for the dead being raised, however, that happened according to program.

After this high-tension episode, I pulled myself together, only to fall into a cruel and unusual pit which the treacherous Handel dug for 'cellists by writing one single passage in that unfamiliar alto clef which looks so much like the usual tenor clef that before the least suspicion of impending disaster dawns, you are down in the pit, hopelessly floundering.

From this rehearsal I emerged barely alive. But I had enjoyed myself so much more than I had suffered (let us draw a veil over the sufferings of the others), that my initial impulse to rush at sight into strange orchestras became stereotyped into a habit.

My visit to Walthers had spun itself out from a few months to two years, and had turned me into a semi-permanent fixture in his household. They would have been two years of pure delight if it had not been for Priscilla. I missed her. Whenever I heard lovely music I thought of her and wished she were in the next seat, holding hands under cover of the program. I knew that things would sound twice as well if she were there.

Whenever we played in Walthers's big music-room I wished she were sitting at the piano, taller, of course, with a longer, thicker pig-tail, and a capacity to accompany most sympathetically everything I had learned since we parted.

And I thought again how delicious that first chord had sounded, the day she and Bill and I had met for our first taste of a Gurlitt trio. How splendidly she did play!

I grew to wanting the sight of her to such an extent that nothing else mattered much. My school work fell off. I began to neglect even the 'cello, and spent more and more time writing long letters to Priscilla, and bad verse in which I compared her to all the more desirable musical deities of Greece and Rome which I had run across in the school-books.

Finally I was allowed to go home for a visit. And the first thing I did, after greeting father, was to rush for Priscilla's house. She came to the door herself. When she saw who it was she started to turn pale, but thought better of it and turned a beautiful pink instead and drew me inside and threw her arms around my neck with a little squeak of joy.

All at once I had a surprise. I saw that she had grown into a young lady in my absence; but she too, strange to say, had been faithful — though it did not seem strange to me then.

Her hair had gone up and her skirts down. But when we set forth for a memorial ice-cream soda at the same old drug-store, I noticed with feelings of adoration I could not disguise that she had kept the same floating-bubble sort of walk, and she still held her fingers arched a little outwards in the same old, inimitable way.

After the soda we found our old park bench and talked plans for the future just as we used to. Only the future seemed so much nearer now. We had only to finish up high school and skim through college and then study with the greatest musicians of Europe for a few brief years before setting forth together on that concert tour of the world which we had once planned out in detail, and now seized the opportunity to shatter to bits and remould nearer to the heart's desire.

"Oh, Priscilla!" I cried, hugging her hard in just the old way, "I can hardly wait to play with you again! We won't do trios this time, will we? No third party need apply, eh? Not even Bill."

"I can't wait, either," she said softly, looking up at me with the big blue eyes that had not changed a bit.

Then I told her about the lovely new solos I had brought from Walthers's to play with her. And she told me to hurry up and bring them and the big fiddle and myself around right after dinner and we could have the music-room all to ourselves.

I scarcely ate any dinner. And, as soon as was decent, I seized the "dog-house" and the music and dashed for Priscilla's. My heart seemed to raise itself up and turn over with a great flop, I loved her so as she stood by the piano rustling the pages of my new music.

> "The rest may reason and welcome, 't is we musicians
> know,"

I quoted rapturously into her little pink ear.

"What's that?" she asked.

There is no later enjoyment which can improve much on the feeling with which you introduce your first sweetheart to your first poetry-enthusiasm. I had learned about more than Beethoven quartets at Walthers's. Walthers's wife was as enthusiastic a poetry "fan" as my cousin was a music "fan," and since meeting Priscilla I had met Browning and had fallen hopelessly under the spell of his poems, especially those about music.

"Don't you know what that is?" I demanded. "Where's the one-volume Browning? We can't go on with this till I've showed you my favorite poem. I hope it will be your favorite too."

I drew her down upon my knee and read her "Abt Vogler" while she ran her fingers lightly in and out of my hair. Her eyes lighted up sympathetically as I read. They got darker blue, like the sea, I thought, when you look down into a deep pool from a big rock along the shore.

"That's simply ripping!" cried Priscilla. "That puts us into just the right mood! And now we'll begin the first rehearsal for our concert tour of the world."

She went over to the piano and looked again at the pile of music I had brought. Then she gave one of her delightful, rippling laughs.

"Only think how we once loved that poor little baby composer Gurlitt! Why, we're miles past him now!"

She sat down and began to strum one of the pieces while I tried to tune up.

"Please give me A, Priscilla," I begged.

She put her finger on the A, which was really an octave too high for me, but would do, and immediately returned to her strumming. I could not hear how to tune the other strings. It was disconcerting. Walthers had all his pianists carefully trained to keep quiet at first and give the fiddlers a chance.

"Say, Priscilla," I said absently, "please have a heart."

I had to say it again before she realized what I was driving at. Then she stopped at once and apologized prettily. As I twisted the pegs up and down, I noticed something new about her: how stiff and straight her back was. Had I by any chance stiffened it with my innocent request?

I felt a bit embarrassed; and when you are embarrassed it is hard to tune a 'cello, especially if your pegs stick. You screw the strings either too high or too low, and they sound horrid as they slide rapidly past the main floor, like an elevator in the hands of a green girl on her first day at work. Perhaps it was only imagination, but I thought Priscilla was trying not to show on her sensitive and expressive little face just what she thought of my skill in running a musical elevator.

We chose from the pile of music the "Méditation" from "Thaïs"; and I importantly gave her the signal to begin, with something of the condescending manner with which I had seen great fiddlers nod to their accompanists in public.

The expression marks on the music said to begin very softly, and I did so, turning over the bow so that only three or four horse-hairs were touching the strings. But Priscilla started out playing so loud that I could not hear myself at all. And she could not hear when I stopped. I had to rap with my bow as a signal, the way the conductor of an orchestra does when he desires silence.

"Priscilla, dear," I said, "would you please play soft?"

"All right."

She let up a little, but so little that now I could just barely hear my own tone.

I stopped again and touched her on the shoulder.

"Don't you see, dear," I suggested in a patient voice, "that the music is marked *piano*, not *forte?* Let's begin again."

We made a fresh start. But, to my dismay, even then Priscilla kept on putting her back into it. That soft passage sounded as loud as the "Anvil Chorus" from "Il Trovatore." I stopped again and reasoned with her.

"Can't you hear how loud you're playing, Priscilla?" I asked her in a voice which, I swear, was no more than beseeching. "You're covering my tone all up. Don't you see that it takes all the fun out of music to play everything loud like that?"

A spot of red appeared in each of her cheeks.

"But I was n't at all," she insisted. "I was really playing quite soft. Let's start again."

Once more the Steinway grand resounded to her robust touch in the soft passage. She was still putting her back into it. I was by this time rather on edge, so I thought I would try the effect of humor.

I took my bow off the strings in the middle of a phrase and said politely:

"Say, Priscilla, do you know what you ought to be called? From the way you play *forte* where it says *piano*, you ought to be called a 'fortist,' not a 'pianist.' Let's begin once more."

Priscilla preserved an ominous silence. Only her back seemed to get even straighter, and she played that soft passage as if she were trying to work off steam. It was deafening.

My steam suddenly worked off, too.

"Sh-sssss!" I exclaimed. "For Heaven's sake, let up!"

Priscilla swung about on the piano stool with her eyes ablaze.

"Oh, I just hate you!" she cried passionately. "You've got to be nothing but a horrid musical prig out there at that cousin of yours! Go on back and play with him, if that's what you like!"

My spirit was roused, too.

"You bet it's what I like!" I declared with emphasis. "And all this time I was thinking of you as a pianist!"

"Oh, dear!" cried Priscilla, bursting into a terrible fit of tears, "I hope I'll never, *never* see you again!"

At that she fled upstairs, leaving me to pack up my paraphernalia and let myself out, in blank, embittered astonishment. I had not known that a girl who really loved you could act that way after a gentle little rebuke — put humorously, too, so as to soften it! . . .

As I came away from Priscilla's I had a feeling that the world was at an end and that I should probably never smile again. There was nothing left in life. But, as I began to put the 'cello away in the corner, my hand seemed unwilling to leave it there. I took it between my knees and began mournfully to play.

Some disappointed lovers find consolation in drink, some in gambling, or other girls. As for me, I found it in fiddling. And as I fiddled, there arose a vision of the most delectable existence in the world, free from routine, from monotony, from girls, especially those who pound the piano to smithereens — the glorious, carefree, scintillating kaleidoscopic existence of the musical vagabond. What were girls in my life, anyway? What need they ever be save a cynical memory?

I determined to become a fiddler errant.

CHAPTER IV

FIDDLERS ERRANT

MY high mood of scorn for the sex represented by Priscilla evaporated, as such moods must, but not my yearning for the delights of musical vagabondage. In fact, from that day on, I never lost an opportunity for fiddling errantry. I had inherited enough money from that forethoughtful publisher, my grandfather, to allow me to travel freely whenever I had a vacation from school or college. And I spent all my spare time roaming to and fro and up and down seeking what I might devour in the way of musical fun.

I found to my pleased surprise that the experienced amateur fiddler may wander where he will, and always be sure of a welcome. His talent is bound to add a sparkle of romance — real or potential — to what might otherwise turn out to be a hopelessly dull pilgrimage. Play where you please, you never can tell what friend-ever-after may not come rushing up to you afterwards with glowing face and outstretched hand to announce himself. Or, you may freely take the initiative yourself. (I understand that my father, when he was still a college-boy, first beheld my mother during an impromptu musical lark, and made a bee-line for her as soon as he had finished his solo.) You never can tell, as you bear your precious fiddle through the streets, what magic casement may not open on the foam (if only of near-beer), and what faëry hand may not beckon you within to do the one thing needful to opus 59, or draw a valiant bow in the battle of Schumann Quintet.

Later on I found that this sparkle of romance was particularly brilliant and satisfying in really musical countries where every tenth house holds a devotee ready to welcome a brother chamber musician with open arms. In Edward Everett Hale's famous story the belated traveler in the hostile country-side had merely to murmur "In His Name," and hospitable hearths blazed for him like magic. But in certain far-away musical towns, if you are a thoroughbred fiddler errant, you need not say a word. You have merely to pucker your lips and whistle some theme from opus 59. As for such towns, however, candor obliges me to admit at once that I never quite succeeded in running them to earth. Next year I fully expect to. I fancy they lie in the neighborhood of Carcassonne.

As a fiddler errant I found that traveling with a 'cello is not all beer and skittles. It is almost as good — and almost as bad — as traveling with a child. It helps you, for example, in cultivating friendly relations with fellow passengers. Suppose there is a broken wheel, or the engineer is waiting for Number 26 to pass, or you are stalled for three days in a blizzard — what more jolly than to undress your 'cello and play each of those present the tune he would most like to hear, and lead the congregational singing of "Dixie," "Old Black Joe," "Drink to me only," and "Home, Sweet Home"? A fiddle may even make tenable one of those railway junctions which Stevenson cursed as the nadir of intrinsic uninterestingness.

But this is merely the bright side. In some ways traveling with a 'cello is as uncomfortable as traveling, not only with a baby, but with a donkey. Unless, indeed, you have an instrument with a convenient hinged door in the back so that you may pack it full of pyjamas, collars, brushes, manuscripts, and so forth, thus dispensing with a bag; or unless you can take off its top and use the instrument as a canoe on occasion, a 'cello is about as inconvenient a traveling companion as the corpse in Stevenson's tale, which would insist on getting into the wrong box.

Some idea of the awkwardness of taking the 'cello along in a sleeping-car may be gathered from its nicknames. It is called the "bull-fiddle." It is called the "dog-house." But, unlike either bulls or kennels, it cannot safely be forwarded by freight or express. The formula for Pullman travel with a 'cello is as follows.

First ascertain whether the conductor will allow you aboard with the instrument. If not, try the next train. When successful, fee the porter heavily at sight, thus softening his heart so that he will assign the only spare upper berth to your baby. And warn him in impressive tones that the instrument is priceless, and on no account to touch it. You need not fear thieves. Sooner than steal a 'cello, the light-fingered would button his coat over a baby white-elephant and let it tusk his vitals.

I have cause to remember my first and only holiday trip with the Princeton Glee, Mandolin, and Banjo Clubs, the year after my quarrel with Priscilla. My function being to play solos and to assist the Mandolin Club, I demanded for the 'cello an upper berth in the special car. But I was overwhelmed with howls of derision and assurances that I was a very fresh freshman indeed. The first night my instrument reposed in some mysterious recess under a leaky cooler, where all too much water flowed under its bridge before the dawn. The second night it was compressed into a straight and narrow closet with brushes and brooms, whence it emerged with a hollow chest, a stoop, a consumptive quality of voice, and the malady known as *compressio pontis.* Thereafter it occupied the same upper with me. Twice I overlay it, with well-nigh fatal consequences.

Short-distance travel with a 'cello is not much more agreeable. In trolleys you have to hold it more delicately than any babe, and be ready to give a straight-arm to any one who lurches in your direction, and to raise it from the floor every time you jolt over cross-tracks or run over pedestrians, for fear of jarring the delicate adjustment of the sound-post. As for a holiday crush downtown, the best way to negotiate it with a 'cello is to fix the sharp steel end-pin in place, and then, holding the instrument horizontally, impale those who seem most likely to break its ribs.

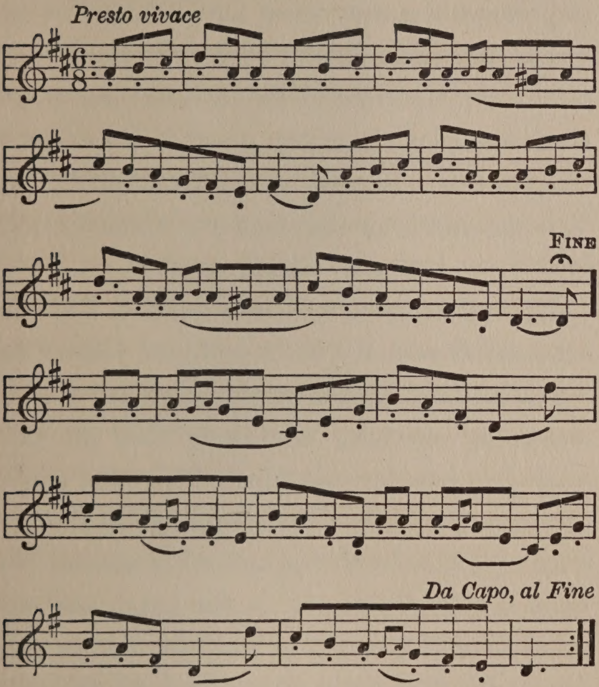
After my full share of such experiences, I learned that if you are a fiddler errant, it is better to leave your instrument at home and live on the country, as it were, trusting to the fact that you can beg, borrow, or rent some kind of fiddle and of chamber music almost anywhere, if you know how to go about it.

Only don't try it in Sicily!

During one long vacation I had buried the fiddler in the errant pure and simple, when, one sunset, across a gorge in Monte Venere, my first strain of Sicilian music floated, to re-awaken in me all the primeval instincts of the musical adventurer. The melody came from the reed pipe of a goatherd as he drove his flock down into Taormina. Such a pipe was perhaps to Theocritus what the fiddles of Stradivarius are to us. It was pleasant to imagine that this goatherd's music might possibly be the same that used to inspire the tenderest of Sicilian poets twenty-three hundred years ago.

Piercingly sweet, indescribably pathetic, the melody recalled the Largo in Dvořák's "New World Symphony." Yet, there on the mountain-side, with Ætna rosy on the right, and the purple Mediterranean shimmering far below, the voice of the reed sounded more divine than any English horn or Boehm flute I had ever heard singing in the depths of a modern orchestra. And I began to doubt whether music was so completely a product of the last three centuries as it purported to be.

But that evening, when the goatherd, ensnared by American gold, turned himself into a modern chamber musician in my hotel room, I regained poise. Removed from its properly romantic setting, like seaweed from the sea, the pastoral stop of Theocritus became unmistakably a penny whistle, with an intonation of the penny whistle's conventional purity. My captured Strephon seemed to realize that the environment was against him and that things were going "contrairy"; for he refused to venture on any of the soft Lydian airs of Monte Venere, and confined himself strictly to tarantellas, native dances, which he played with a magnificent feeling for rhythm (if not for intuneness) while, with a pencil, I caught — or muffed — them on the fly. One was to this effect:



While this was going on, a chance hotel acquaintance dropped into the room and revealed himself as a professor by explaining that the tarantella was named for its birthplace, the old

Greek city of Taranto over yonder in the heel of the Italian boot; that dancing it was once considered the only cure for the maddening bite of the spider known as the *Lycosa Tarantula;* and that some of the melodies our goatherd was playing might possibly be ancient Greek tunes, handed down traditionally in Taranto, and later dispersed over Calabria and Sicily.

This all sounded rather academic. But his next words sent the little professor soaring in my estimation. He disclosed himself as a fiddler errant by wistfully remarking that all this made him long for two things: his violin, and a chance to play trios. Right heartily did I introduce myself as 'cellist errant at his service. We knew a splendid pianist in the hotel, and decided to visit Catania to scout for fiddles and music. We thought we would look for the music first.

Next day, accordingly, we invaded the largest music store in Catania. Did they have trios for violin, violoncello, and piano? "Certainly!" We were shown a derangement of "La Somnambula" for violin and piano, and another for 'cello and piano. If we omitted one of the piano parts, we were assured, a very beautiful trio would result, as surely as one from four makes three.

Finding us hard to please, the storekeeper referred us to the conductor of the Opera, who offered to rent us all the standard works of chamber music. The "trios" he offered us turned out to be elementary pieces labeled "For Piano and Violin or 'Cello." But nothing we could say was able to persuade our conductor that "or" did not mean "and." To this day I feel sure that he is ready to defend his interpretation of this word against all comers.

We turned three more music stores upside down and had already abandoned the hunt in despair when we discovered a fourth in a narrow side street. There were only five minutes in which to catch the train; but in thirty seconds we had unearthed a genuine piece of chamber music. Hallelujah! it was the finale of the first Beethoven trio!

Suddenly the oil of joy curdled to mourning. The miserable thing was an arrangement for piano solo! We left hurriedly when the proprietor began assuring us that the original effect would be secured if the piano was doubled in the treble by the violin and in the bass by the 'cello.

This piano solo was the nearest approach to chamber music that we could find in the island of Trinacria. But afterwards, recollecting the misadventure in tranquillity, we concluded that it was as absurd to look for chamber music in Sicily as to look for a Masefield sonnet among the idylls of Theocritus.

Until I graduated from Princeton, I had found my happiest hunting-grounds, as a musical vagabond, abroad in the vacations. Then suddenly fiddler's luck seemed to change and become more of a native product. The very first week I went to live in New York I met in upper Broadway, of all places, with the sort of adventure that figures in the fondest dreams of fiddlers errant. I had strolled into the nearest hotel to use the telephone. As I passed through the restaurant, my attention was caught by a vaguely familiar strain from the musicians' gallery. Surely this was unusual spiritual provender to offer a crowd of typical New York diners! More and more absorbed in trying to recognize the music, I sank into an armchair in the lobby, the telephone quite forgotten. The instruments were working themselves up to some magnificent climax, and working me up at the same time. It began to sound more and more like the greatest of all music — the musician's very holiest of holies. Surely I must be dreaming! My fingers crooked themselves for a pinch. But just then the unseen instruments swung back into the great opening theme of the Brahms piano quartet in A major. Merciful Heavens! A Brahms quartet in Broadway? Pan in Wall Street? Silence. With three jumps I was up in the little gallery, wringing the hands of those performers and calling down blessings upon their quixotism as musical missionaries. "Missionaries?" echoed the leader in amusement. "Ah, no. We could never hope to convert those down there." He waved a scornful hand at the consumers of lobster below. "Now and then we play Brahms just in order that we may save our own souls." The 'cellist rose, saluted, and extended his bow in my direction, like some proud commander surrendering his sword. "Will it please you," he inquired, "to play the next movement?" It pleased me.

Scene: a city composed of one store and three houses, on the shores of Newfoundland.

Time: one of those times when a fellow needs a friend — when he is in a stern, strange land on pleasure bent — and has to have a check cashed. I do not know why it is that one always runs out of ready money in Newfoundland. Perhaps because salmon flies are such fleeting creatures of a day that you must send many postal orders to St. John's for more. Perhaps because the customs officials at Port au Basques make you deposit so much duty on your fishing tackle. At any rate, there I was penniless, with the burly storekeeper scowling in a savage manner at my check and not knowing at all whether to take a chance on it. Finally he thought he would not, but conceded that I might spend a night under his roof, as there was really nowhere else to go.

At this pass something made me think of the art of music. Perhaps it was the parlor piano which, when new, back in the stone age, had probably been in tune. I inquired whether there were any other instruments. The wreckage of a violin was produced. With two pieces of string and a table fork I set up the prostrate sound-post. I glued together the bridge and put it in position. The technic of the angler proved helpful in splicing together some strange-looking strings. The A was eked out with a piece of salmon leader, while an old mandolin yielded a wire E.

When all was at last ready, a fresh difficulty occurred to me. The violin was an instrument which I had never learned to play! But necessity is the mother of pretension. I thought of that check. And placing the small fiddle carefully between my knees, I pretended that it was a 'cello.

So the daughter of the house seated herself at the relic of the stone age, and we had a concert. Newfoundland appeared not to be overfinicky in the matter of pitch and tone-quality. And how it did enjoy music! As the audience was of Scotch-English-Irish descent, we rendered equal parts of "Comin' Through the Rye," "God Save the King," and "Kathleen Mavourneen." Then the proprietor requested the Sextet from "Lucia." While it was forthcoming he toyed furtively with his bandana. When it ceased he encored it with all his might. Then he slipped out storewards and presently returned with the fattest, blackest, most formidable-looking cigar I ever saw, which he gravely proffered me.

"We like," he remarked in his quaint

idiom, "to hear music at scattered times." He was trying to affect indifference. But his gruff voice wavered, and I knew then that music hath charms to cash the savage check.

All these adventures happened back in that incredibly quiet time before the Great War. I then thought that I had drained the enchanted cup of fiddler's magic to the lees. Little did I suspect that the best was yet to come.

Since then experience has roughly demonstrated to my entire satisfaction that nothing offers a more effective contrast to the precariously snatched pleasures of the musical vagabond than a vigorous war which keeps one completely occupied most of the time in highly unmusical pursuits. It is like the raw oatmeal which the sophisticated epicure swallows in order to clear his palate for an entire appreciation of the deliciousness of the subsequent ortolan's tongue. Now, though such epicureanism was scarcely the motive that rushed me into khaki, the effect was much the same.

Before I come, however, to the adventures of fiddlers militant, let me recount one pre-war orgy of chamber music that was almost as palatable as any which followed it. It was one of those unforeseen little earthly paradises full of

> "Soul-satisfying strains — alas! too few" —

which fiddlers errant hope to find in each new spot they visit, but which usually precede them at the pace with which the wily old safe-cracker, with money on his head, precedes the amateur detective.

The adventure came to me in a California city, while I was gathering material for a book of travel (for, in order to keep my standing unblemished as an amateur musician I had embraced letters as a profession). On my first evening there I was taken to dine with a well-known writer in his beautiful home, which he had built with his own two hands in the Spanish mission style during the spare hours of fourteen years. This gentleman had no idea that I was to be thrust upon him. A friend had brought me there unannounced. But his hospitality went so far as to insist, before the evening was over, that I must stay a week. He would not take no for an answer. And for my part I had no desire to say no, because he was a delightful person, his home with its leaf-filled patio was most alluring, and I had discovered promising possibilities for fiddlers errant in the splendid music-room and the collection of phonograph records of Indian music which my host had himself made in Arizona and New Mexico. Then, too, there were rumors of skillful musical vagabonds in the vicinity.

Such an environment fairly cried aloud for impromptu fiddling. So, armed with a note to the best violinist in that part of California, I set forth next morning on the trail of the ideal orgy. At the address given I was told that my man had moved and his whereabouts were not known. That was a setback, indeed! But determined fiddlers errant usually land on their feet. On the way back I chanced to hear some masterly strains of Bach-on-the-violin issuing from a brown bungalow. And ringing at a venture I was confronted by the very person I sought.

Blocking the doorway he read the note, looking as bored as professionals usually do when asked to play with amateurs. Just as he began to tell me how busy he was and how impossible, and so forth, he happened to glance again at the envelope, and a very slight gleam came into his eye.

"But you're not by any chance the fellow who wrote that stuff about fiddlers in the 'Atlantic,' are you?" he inquired. At my nod he very flatteringly unblocked the doorway and dragged me inside, pumping my hand up and down in a painful manner, shouting for his wife, and making various kind representations, all at the same time. His talk gradually simmered down into an argument that of course the only thing to do was to fiddle together that very night.

I asked who had the best 'cello in town. He told me the man's name, but looked dubious. "The trouble is," said the violinist, "he loves that big Amati as if it were twins. I doubt if he could bring himself to lend it to any one. But, let's try, anyhow."

He scribbled a card to his 'cellist friend and promised, if I were successful, to bring along a good pianist and play trios in the evening. So I set forth on the trail of the Amati. Its owner had just finished his noonday stint in a hotel orchestra and looked somewhat tired and cross. He glanced at the card and then assumed a most conservative expression and tried to fob off on me a cheap 'cello belonging to one of his pupils, which sounded very much as a three-cent cigar tastes. At this point I gave him the secret thumb-position grip of the confraternity of 'cellists, and whispered into his ear one of those magic passwords of the craft which in a trice convinced him that I was in a position to dandle a 'cello with as tender solicitude as any man alive. On my promising, moreover, to taxicab it both ways with the sacred burden, he passed the Amati over, and the orgy of fiddlers errant was assured.

That night how those beautiful Spanish walls did resound to Beethoven and Dvořák and Brahms, most originally interspersed with the voice of the Mexican servant and his guitar, with strange, lovely songs of the aboriginal West and South — and with the bottled sunshine of Californian hill-slopes; while El Alcalde Maiore, the lone gnarled tree-giant that filled the patio, looked in through the open windows and contributed, by way of accompaniment, leafy arpeggios *sotto voce*. And sometimes, during rests, I remembered to be thankful that I had once snapped my fingers at the howling wolf, and at fat pot-boilers, while I scribbled for the "Atlantic" that little essay on fiddlers which had gained me this priceless evening.

CHAPTER V

I FIDDLE DUETS WITH THE TRUMP OF WAR

MY adventures as a fiddler militant began with the extremely musical sound made by a postal card as it came clicking through my Boston letter slot. Filled with gloomy forebodings by what the examiner for the first Plattsburg Reserve Officers' Training Camp had told me a few days before, I had been watching that slot with a ferret's eye and the mind of a prisoner at the bar when the jury is filing in.

"You're all right," the examiner had said, "except your occupation. Of course, you know, being an author is against you."

But now through the slot this magic postal card, with its rich, roseate hue, burst into the middle of Blue Monday. The resulting shade was a royal purple of triumph. It directed me to report as number 2056 to the Commanding Officer at Plattsburg the day after to-morrow. Whoop-la! what a relief!

Then I turned the radiant thing over to the address side, half expecting to see myself already called by the honorable title of "Candidate." Name of a name! *It was addressed to another man!*

I descended into hell, and there and then decided to attend the Williams College R.O.T.C. and prepare for a more successful assault on the portals of the second Plattsburg. My plan of campaign was to execute a frontal attack in person, while dispatching my grave and reverend publisher on an expedition against the Washington flank, heavily armed with propaganda to the effect that the present chief need of the infantry was experienced writers.

I will flit in an airy manner over my musical activities at Williamstown. You remember the one good witticism of that arch-bromide Philip Gilbert Hamerton? He remarked that old writers like Sir Thomas Malory sometimes condensed a whole psychological novel into the single phrase, "When twenty years had come and gone." In like manner my adventures as a fiddler militant at Williamstown might be summarized in a still more compact formula which was to recur so often in the reports of my scout officers in the trenches: N.T.R.

Nothing to report. That is to say, unless we except those Sunday afternoon groups around a certain hospitable piano when dear old enthusiastic Walthers appeared, fiddle in hand and with double bars on his shoulders, and we played trios, while, every other movement, I was spelled off by the nephew who, a few weeks hence, was to hitch his ambulance to a star, and his Ford 'cello to the ceiling of his ambulance, and "fliv" about France for two years as an up-to-date good Samaritan, pouring in oil and gas and fiddling his *blessés* back to life and the front-line trenches.

Stay! There *was* one *bona-fide* musical adventure when my half-brother, the real honest to goodness pianist, came to spend a week-end with me. That is, every one swore that he had rounded into a real pianist. Personally I did n't know, for I had n't seen more than twenty-four hours' worth of him since the early days when his musical performances, though vigorous, were exclusively vocal. I did n't know, for, since my break with Priscilla, I did not take such things for granted any more. I had been disillusioned once too often. I now had to be shown.

Well, here was the young brother, and here was my own Gaspar, the strangest, funniest, oldest, nicest 'cello that had ever been handed down for the ultimate delectation of that new world which had been discovered only about a half-century before its advent. And here was a genial professor with a succulent Steinway grand set in the studio of his wife whose paintings gladdened the eye whenever the eye had a measure's rest or so. What was it Browning once caterwauled about never the time and the place and the pianist all together? We fooled him that day.

> "Time, you thief, who love to get
> Sweets into your list, put that in!"

Here was the young upstart of a brother whom I had mislaid all his life long, sitting down to Brahms sonatas for piano and Gaspar, and reading them at sight with the ease and *abandon* to the sound and sense with which I myself could read Palgrave's "Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics"; — yes, and with his delicious touch, achieving that well-nigh mythical feat (for a pianist) of playing softly when he encountered the mystic hieroglyph *pp.* There was no question whatever of calling this chap a *fortist.* He actually played the hyphenated piano-forte, holding a just balance on either side of the hyphen.

I was filled with a sense of the joy of life, and its absurdity. Here was I, after having hunted all over creation for the ideal chamber-music pianist, and having found only two or three (who would never stay put), stumbling inadvertently upon one in the bosom of the family. And here were we, not proposing to stay put, either, but — while ravished by the beauties of Brahms — both setting forth on diverging paths to slay as many of the compatriots of Brahms as possible.

You may perhaps think it strange, gentle reader, that I referred to my 'cello a moment ago, as "Gaspar." Do you not know that it is impossible to have such a sensitive, human, strongly individualized pet as a 'cello in the home, without naming it? My various 'cellos have always appealed to me as creatures essentially masculine and have borne such virile names as "Lupy," "Ben" (short for Benvenuto Cellini), and "Gaspar" ("Gasp," for short). This is, I know, contrary to the procedure of most 'cellists who call their instruments their wives and christen them with fluffy names like "Geraldine" and "Rosabelle" and "Flossie." I even knew one great, fat, pink-jowled optimist who called his bull-fiddle "Pollyanna." But as for me I deplore such effeminate practices as derogating from the true dignity of the art of bull-fiddling.

A word more (as the minister always says halfway through the sermon) and I am done with the militant music of Billtown. I like to remember the inspiriting drum corps that marched us to mess in the college commons, and the purple patches of song that used to burst forth before dessert in praise of Alma Mater, Lord Jeffrey Amherst, and other deities; and how sonorously we were accustomed to intercede for those in peril on the sea, during those hideously early Sunday morning chapels.

But with even more appreciation do I recall the choral greeting given by us of the rank and file of the Williams Battalion during a certain maneuver, to one of the youngest and ablest members of the military faculty. We called him "Lieutenant," though he was only a pseudo-shavetail, being still under the age of consent on the part of Uncle Sam. He had a short stature, which he more than made up for by a Napoleonic nobility of attitude, and a highly appreciated talent for the dramatic. If it had been at all in keeping with the letter or the spirit of Infantry Drill Regulations, you felt certain that his favorite posture would have been that one of the Little Corporal's poses which caused the cootie-ridden doughboy to remark that now at last he understood why Napoleon was always photographed with his hand inside his shirt.

Well, there we were, sweltering on the dusty road in a humble column of squads. To us entered, galloping with pomp and circumstance, awe and majesty, upon a huge, milk-white charger, the pseudo-shavetail. Then suddenly, as one man, the entire column combusted spontaneously into choric song. And these were the words we sang:

"The Son of God goes forth to war!"

One final vignette. The dormitories had been turned into barracks, and in the next room lived banjos, banjorines, mandolins, mandolas, guitars, guitarettes, ukeleles, and, in a musical sense, every creeping thing. During the day we were granted five minutes for rest between drill periods. During the night we had an hour between lectures and taps. After meals we had at least a quarter of an hour for undiluted repose. These periods were always employed, to the uttermost second by the comrades next door, in laying offerings upon the altar of the modern muse, Polyragthymnia. The process sounded at times as though the altar were constructed of sheet iron, and the gifts took the form of a varied sheaf of kitchen utensils, let fall upon it from a considerable height.

One Sunday evening Gaspar and I could no longer resist the siren lures of Music, Heavenly Maid. We entered next door, and close on our heels there thronged in performers upon the flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, kazoo, snare-drum, and all kinds of music. The mantel-shelf was replete with the entire banjo family, two deep. The trombonist sat enthroned upon the Encyclopædia Britannica, Eleventh Edition, to its apparent disadvantage.

We were just at the height of a spirited rendition of "They 're wearing 'em higher in Hawaii," whose sonority must have immobilized the clock on the distant college tower and made the wretched factory children of North Adams stir uneasily in their troubled sleep, when I saw a face peering in over the heads of all Williamstown, which were inserted raptly into the large window. The face was ghastly white. The eyeballs were well-nigh popping from their sockets. The whole expression was one of terrified stupefaction, which changed to malevolent comprehension when it caught sight of my own unworthy features.

The bow dropped from my nerveless grasp. With a low moan of shame not unmingled with compassion, I recognized the distorted visage of one of the most celebrated organists of New York City. As a music critic I had once attacked him for not being sufficiently high-brow.

CHAPTER VI

PLATTSBURG DEALS WITH THE MUSES

THE citadel at Washington had succumbed to the flanking movement of my redoubtable publisher. Another postal had clicked through another letter slot, this time with the right name on the obverse side, and here I was, at Plattsburg, New York, in the 6th New England, lined up with my new comrades in company front, when an orderly arrived with a dispatch for our captain. He read it and, calling me out before all the others, exclaimed:

"Report at once to the Post Commandant!"

Now you may dispatch a chap on a tightrope reconnaissance from the top of the Metropolitan Tower to the top of the Flatiron Building; or cause him to patrol Fifth Avenue from Twenty-Third to Forty-Second Streets clad in his birthday clothes, and he will feel no more uncomfortably conspicuous than a three-days'-

old candidate, not yet reconciled to the eccentricities of canvas leggins, who should be haled without warning out of drill formation to visit the commandant on business unspecified.

The business was as yet unspecified, but in the marrow of my bones I felt what was up. The commandant had discovered, through the detective service of his Intelligence section, the damning fact that I was a poet; had added this up, like two and two, to my being a vagabond fiddler, and had decided that such a combination could never make a doughboy. I was going to be kicked out and disgraced. Shedding my pack and Springfield, I advanced toward headquarters with inelastic tread.

The portal yawned. I girded myself together, stepped inside, schooled my features to look somewhat like those of the Admirable Crichton in the first act where he is a butler, and pulled off a well-nigh perfect textbook salute. The commandant pulled off a far less perfect one, smiled pleasantly, rose to his feet, and to my utter astonishment, shook hands in a genial manner and offered me a chair. This, thought I in bewilderment, is not what any of the books have led me to expect. It is administering the fatal pill dissolved in a large, sweet Martini.

"So you're a fiddler militant," observed Colonel Wolf. "I know all about you. I've read your stuff. Pleased to meet you. Now, won't you play that big fiddle of yours for the men some night in our open-air stadium? And I'd be glad to have you serve on the Entertainment Committee."

He pressed a bell and introduced me to Captain Baer, his adjutant. (A year and a half later, in Advance General Headquarters, Treves, Germany, I found that same captain in an adjoining office with the buzzards of a colonel on his shoulders, while my old commandant, on the Luxembourg border near at hand, wore the star of a brigadier-general.) I explained to the adjutant that I would be glad to play if I could brush aside certain slight difficulties, which were:

I. I was out of practice, owing to the exigencies of squads right and right shoulder arms.
II. I had no music.
III. I had no accompanist.
IV. I had no 'cello.

Apart from this I was quite ready.

The adjutant expressed his confidence that I would easily make as nought these trifling handicaps. "You know," he said, "America expects every man to do the impossible." Then he introduced me to my fellow members of the Entertainment Committee: Candidate Bud Fisher, Candidate Robert Warwick, and others equally good and great.

It next fell to my lot to direct the activities of these gentlemen in decorating the stadium stage with evergreen branches, to secure which we reverted to type and became arboreal; and with ferns, to secure which we groveled in the thick undergrowth of a deep swamp. To this day I recall with pleasure the appearance of a renowned but sedentary sporting editor as he swung from branch to branch, and that of a celebrated but somewhat sybaritic tenor as he emerged from the swamp, having bitten the muck and mingled it with his golden vocal cords.

To complicate matters, we had all just had a "shot in the arm" that noon, which was taking with especial virulence. It was a sorry-looking crew of celebrities who, under my temporary control, stood about viewing their handiwork as exterior decorators and working their poor arms like pump-handles in a misguided and vain attempt to ward off stiffness. I wish I could introduce a snap-shot of them at this point. The reader would see that, by some strange force of association, those who did not look like Mutt bore a striking resemblance to Jeff.

It now occurred to me that I must play in public that evening, so I obtained an extension of respite from squads right, hurried into the metropolis and persuaded the leading, and in fact the only, 'cellist to loan me the leading, and in fact the only, 'cello of Plattsburg.

I still remember with mingled emotions that night's performance. Aside from the fact that an icy wind blew full upon the ill-starred "dog-house" that I clutched between my knees, thus rapidly altering the pitch of the strings while I played, and that my arm was so stiff from the shot and the subsequent tree-climbing and wallowing that I could scarce lift hand to string; and that a laboring freight locomotive came puffing and groaning along on the tracks near by and quite drowned out the latter half of the tune — the performance was fairly successful in showing that as an amateur fiddler I was an excellent soldier. For no performance could have failed entirely, with that radio-active accompanist, Candidate Breitenfeld, pushing on the reins at the piano behind my back — he who had composed "The Last Long Mile" only the day previous, and had conducted its first performance, just before my solo.

Will any Plattsburg man ever forget the sings we had while waiting for those sempiternal lectures? One dramatic moment comes back vividly to mind, when the entire body of candidates — who had never before sung together anything more devotional in character than "The Bells of Hell Go Ting-a-ling-a-ling" — suddenly burst forth by unanimous telepathic consent into a superb, nobly moving rendition of "O Come All Ye Faithful." Then, without drawing breath, in an instant revulsion from the "Sunday stuff," everybody roared at the top of his lungs the somewhat similar tune:

"I was drunk last night,
I was drunk the night before;
Going to get drunk to-night if I never get drunk any
more!"

An eccentric old party, dear to the hearts of all R.O.T.C. men, used to visit us once in a while and teach us to improve our tones of military command by vibrating our "head spaces" (presumably the places where the brain ought to be, but was n't), and by holding our noses and blowing through our ears, and other devices generally supposed to be acquired only through interminable and expensive courses of lessons with singing teachers whose names end in *ini* and *elli*. This gentleman's name, however, ended as soon as it began. He was prosaically but fittingly known as Mr. Noyes. It was the second most fitting name I have ever known. The first belonged to a lady who weighed five hundred pounds and rejoiced in the name of Madame Hellbig. Mr. Noyes's name was, as the grammarians would say, highly onomatopoetic, if one might judge from the volume of tone he produced from us three thousand candidates.

His methods were as short as his name. Reasoning from the swiftness with which he taught the gang "K-k-k-Katie" and "Keep Your Head Down," in about ten minutes apiece, I believe that Mr. Noyes could have taught us César Franck's monumental oratorio, "The Beatitudes," in three sittings — provided, of course, that instead of allowing the pious words of the original to reveal that this was high-brow music, the fatal fact had been camouflaged by translating the text into the popular idiom of the doughboy.

Thus, for example, instead of "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," the candidates would have lapped up Franck's soothing strains to such words as:

"What's the use of worrying?
It never was worth while."

Instead of the part about thirsting after righteousness, they would have sung with enthusiasm:

"Nobody knows
How dry I am!"

As for all that stuff about the peacemakers being blessed, I think even that would have gone down if the last word had been taken in the French sense and pronounced *bless-áyed;* otherwise it would have had to be "canned" as too pacifistic in tendency.

Such musical low-browness was, of course, most deplorable, but I did not raise my voice in denunciation, knowing full well the truth of that portion of Scripture which states:

"A prophet is a loss in his own company."

CHAPTER VII

THE REGIMENT BUYS ME A 'CELLO

THE months at Plattsburg resolved themselves into a second lieutenant's commission in the infantry. My instructors informed me rather apologetically that they would have given me a higher rank if I had not been a fiddler and a poet, their inference being that having a mixed command consisting of young lady muses and young gentleman doughboys is not considered the thing in the best military circles. It is an affront to the conventions of the most conventional set in the world.

As for me, I was delighted to get any commission at all. For I had long ago resolved that if I received in lieu of a commission, that acrid and bitter fruit, the raspberry, I would enlist. And I did not begrudge the handicap of the muses. For I would far rather be a gold-barred fiddler militant in crowded barracks than to dwell in the tents of Colonel X at Camp ——.

Colonel X was our most celebrated low-brow. He it was who scolded his bugle-corps for the monotony of their four-noted music. "It's all too much on the same key," he said to the leader. "Liven things up with some runs and trills and flourishes. Now for to-morrow I want you to play 'Joan of Arc.'"

It was no other than Colonel X who once broke up a rehearsal of his regimental band by waving his arms in an impressive manner and roaring:

"Here, what're you trying to do?"

Leader. "We are rehearsing 'The Stars and Stripes Forever,' sir."

Colonel X (leveling a minatory finger at the alto, tenor, and bass trombones). "I want to see those instruments dress up. Want to see those trombone slides all go in and out together in a military manner!"

On another occasion this colonel stopped the same unfortunate band with a rough:

"Here, here, what's all this foolishness?"

Leader (patiently). "What, sir?"

Colonel X (withering the solo trumpeter with a glare). "Why isn't that man working?"

Leader. "He has four measures' rest before his solo, sir."

Colonel. "Now, then, I want you to understand that I won't stand for any more of this slacking. Want you to get music that will keep every man busy all the time. Make 'em all work! Make 'em all work!"

By good luck I was not assigned to this colonel's jurisdiction, but to the finest regiment in the 79th Division. The 313th Infantry, besides containing the best fighting men in camp, had the highest quota of gentlemen and sportsmen among its officers, and the best band. (This is almost invariably the way every soldier talks about his own outfit.)

Our band was directed by Louis Fisher, then an enlisted man, later a captain and the leader of Pershing's Band. As Regimental Intelligence Officer, I commanded the first platoon of Headquarters Company, which included, among a vast and heterogeneous throng, Fisher and his musicians.

One reason why our music was so good was that Fisher had an eagle eye peeled all the time for promising material.

One day he came to me in high excitement and said:

"I've made a wonderful find!"

"Where and what?"

"In a rifle company. I know him. He's the greatest pianist within a hundred miles. Came to camp two weeks ago, a raw recruit. They've had him out there on the parade ground dragging a rifle around till he's half dead. I've asked for him for the band, and got him, too, by Jove!"

"But you can't use a pianist in the band."

"Yes, but we can set him learning some other instrument. He's an all-around musician. What would you advise?"

I advised the oboe. The oboe was as rare as the dodo. Now that we had a superfine musician at our mercy, here was a chance to supply a long-felt want. So our pianist was given an oboe, and soon was making day hideous within a radius of one hundred yards.

That evening Fisher brought him over to the Y.M.C.A. hut to show me what he could do. I can never get out of my mind how incongruously noble and beautiful was his rendering of Chopin's B minor Sonata and the A minor Prelude and Fugue of Bach, as it competed with the rip-roaring atmosphere of that hut. It was as though, out yonder on the bayonet course, some one had hung up the Hermes of Praxiteles by the neck in one of the gallows, instead of the usual straw-stuffed dummies of Boches, for the yelling doughboys to jab with their bayonets as they rushed by. And, looking somewhat like a Hermes thus treated, our pianist rose up after finishing the Bach amid the ribald though innocent whoops of his fellow doughboys, and declared that, circumstances being what they were, he could play no more.

Remembering how the muse had been penalized at Plattsburg, I had thus far kept from

Camp —— the fact that I was a fiddler militant. But now, in the enthusiasm of finding this virtuoso in spiral puttees, the truth somehow leaked out. It did not matter so much, however, because I had already exchanged my gold bars for silver, and because we had no such low-brow colonel as the one who insisted that the different trombone slides must all go in and out together.

In fact, our colonel sent for me and said that he liked music a lot, and would I not take my 'cello along over to France so that, in the regiment's moments of relaxation, I might play for them with the new pianist?

I said I would be glad to play for them if it would not be held against me and put down as a large black blot on my efficiency record; but that my 'cello was nearly as old as Columbus, and that such a fragile and temperamental shell would stand about as much chance in the A.E.F. as a butterfly in a hamburg steak machine.

"All right," said the colonel, "then we'll buy you a good, strong, tough, armor-plated 'cello out of the regimental fund. We've got to have that music."

So next day Fisher and I went to the nearest city and bought the regiment a 'cello, quartermaster-proof as the un-cleft rock of ages, yet sweet and mellow withal. Very fittingly we were helped by a gentleman who was a good amateur performer upon the flute, and had been a close friend of that flute-playing hero of my boyhood, the noble poet and musician militant, Sidney Lanier.

I saw this patriotic amateur draw the violin dealer aside and whisper to him in an authoritative manner. And I have always attributed to this whispered conversation the fact that our available three hundred dollars bought a 'cello which seemed to me worth more like five hundred, together with a good bow, an almost bomb-proof case, and enough strings, glue, clamps, sound-post setters, and extra bridges and tail-piece gut to guard against most eventualities in the S.O.S., except what the insurance policies so elegantly call "foreign enemies and civil commotions."

Alas for the best-laid plans of fiddlers militant! The bomb-proof 'cello arrived at camp along with our embarkation orders. There was no time to play it to the regiment — only to nail it up in its immense coffin along with half of my musical library. With the rest of the heavy freight, it set forth for France a few days ahead of us. As for my great pianist, he was transferred, before we sailed, to another regiment which promised to commission him as band leader, but, having extorted him from us by this promise, kept him an enlisted man.

As long as I am telling how things turned out, let me relate the poetic justice which overtook Colonel X for his lack of appreciation of the art of music. I shall anticipate and show him in action. He was a brave man and exposed himself recklessly until, in a crisis of the Meuse–Argonne offensive, a piece of shrapnel came and wounded him severely in the canteen. Feeling his life-blood chilling in his veins and gushing rapidly down his limb, he raised a frantic howl of "Tourniquet! Tourniquet!" First aid appeared, examined the colonel, and pointed out to him that the skin had not even been broken by the projectile. "Makes no difference!" cried Colonel X. "Get to work here! I won't have any of this slacking! Tourniquet! Tourniquet!"

The tourniquet was applied by the grinning medical staff. It was applied with considerable force, however; and after a time, when all the water had been shed (for he had but one canteen to give for his country), the sufferer decided to take his chances without the aid of science. Not long after, Colonel X was relieved from duty on the field of honor for incompetence.

To return to the regimental 'cello. It was snatched from me more utterly than my pianist. This time, however, I suspect the Boche. It was seen to leave these shores. So far as can be learned, it never landed in France. There is, of course, a chance that it may have been diverted to some other route. At this very moment it may be the soul of the musical life of the bazaars of Bagdad, or be brightening the long winter nights of Archangel. But my personal belief is that it was submarined.

Even if submarined, though, it would have floated, unless weighed down too much by all that heavy sonata music (which, by the way, the Reparations Board refuses to recompense me for, because I never can seem to get all the semicolons in the right place in my vast red-taped acreage of claim-sheets). I never look out of my Larchmont window across Long Island Sound without scanning the offing for a 'cello cast upon the waters. And I always hope that the glue which was a part of its trousseau, is insoluble in brine. If it liquefied and ran all over the rock of ages, it would make an awful mess!

Too bad, even for purely military reasons, that the rock of ages should have been submarined! In open warfare, for example, a 'cello would be invaluable. I can imagine few more effective weapons. Getting out the long, sharp end-pin, affixing it like a bayonet, and bearing resolutely down upon the foe, you would transfix with astonishment every Hun that beheld you until you had transfixed him with the end-pin.

Alas for all these vain imaginings! In my inmost heart I fear that the rock of ages is no more. But my chief regret is that it had to perish so fruitlessly. Now, if that 'cello had only been submarined along with Colonel X, and had gone down under him irrevocably while he was using it as a canoe and thundering to his staff for a life-preserver, I should be resigned to the sacrifice. The rock of ages 'cello would have perished in a worthy cause.

CHAPTER VIII

I MISLAY THE BAND

MY first adventure in France was a musical one. From the capacious maw of the Leviathan we were disgorged, like Jonah from the whale, upon the shores of Brest. *En route* to a place humorously called the "Rest Camp," we were approached by the first detachment of the ten million ingratiating young innocents who were destined, in the ensuing months, to grasp our hands and demand "*une cigarette pour papa à Verdun.*" As we marched, the girls and women smiled and waved and tossed flowers to us. The men, mostly cripples, saluted. It was altogether the most inspiring walk I had ever taken.

By supper-time we made the "Rest Camp." This was a very small enclosure of the sacred but liquid soil of France, roofed by a desperately weeping heaven. The enlisted men threw up their pup tents and, in default of supper, slumbered heavily. We officers had an excellent chance to get near to nature's heart. For our tents, bedding-rolls, and hand-baggage, though officially present, did not appear until late the following day.

About the time they appeared our colonel sent for me and thrust a wad of francs into my hand.

"Lieutenant, we entrain at five-thirty tomorrow morning. You will purchase five rations for each of the headquarters officers. The regimental band is still probably on board the Leviathan. You will see that it entrains."

As I hurried down to the port I realized that I was in a dilemma. If I went out at once in person to get the band, all the stores would be closed before I could return and buy food for the long journey that lay ahead of us. If, on the other hand, I bought the provisions first, I might miss the band. Whichever I did I was almost sure to go wrong.

By good luck I found, almost at once, the skipper of the official lighter, and sent him out to the Leviathan with strict instructions to bring me back that band. Then I got a detail of doughboys and with them raced for the shops against closing time. A strange picture my detail must have made as they stumbled back through the inky streets of Brest. Their arms were heaped high with figs and huge bunches of grapes, and every pocket of their blue jeans was bursting with wine. I thought they offered a fair modern version of the spies returning from the Land of Canaan. But I did not tell them that they looked like spies. It would have been bad for the morale.

At eleven I met the returning lighter. No band! That skipper vowed they had taken another lighter an hour and a half before, bound for a remote place called Pier 7. Gracious Heavens! It was a case of innocents abroad. It was a case of the little children of the fairy tale wandering about bewildered till robin redbreast should come and gently cover them over with beautiful leaves. So far as I knew, that artless band could n't muster two words of

French between it. Even the French horns were pure Irish. Fisher, their leader, had but recently been commissioned. And while he could lead the fingers and the lips of his men through the "Maritana Overture" in masterly fashion, I feared that he might lack the more mundane capacity to guide their feet through the stygian mazes of a strange foreign city, darkened against air-raids. I imagined that miserable band wandering about like lost sheep, weighed down by the tuba and the big bass drum and dragging them wearily deeper and deeper into the dark labyrinth of the slums.

Of course I hastened to Pier 7.

No! Positively no band had arrived there that evening. No band of any kind. If they had, they would most certainly have been held up for a tune. The dusky American stevedores always worked better under the stimulus of the divine art of melody. No band was ever allowed to effect a landing there without limbering up their instruments and playing a shake-down and a cake-walk. "You ought," continued the young shavetail, "to see the 'shines' put their backs into it when that happens. And it happens quite often. They unload a boat in half the time. Say, do you know, what I've seen on this dock has convinced me that we're going to win the war toot sweet. The very first month we Yankees took hold here we unloaded just twenty-nine times as much freight as the French had ever unloaded in their best month. Why, there'll be nothing to it. But about your band. I wish they'd show up here."

I stemmed the young officer's rhapsodies over the effect of my favorite art on the activities of the darker side of the S.O.S. The S.O.S. was not what interested me just then. What interested me was helping to get the 313th Infantry intact to the front. I asked him what he thought could have happened to the band. He could not say for sure, but a couple of lighters had that evening broken away from the Leviathan and were rapidly drifting out to sea in a helpless manner. Perhaps my band was on one of these.

Good Heavens! The outlook was growing worse and worse. A lighter that had got so far out of control as to break away and drift seaward might be in a sinking condition. My unhappy imagination boggled at what it beheld. Why, the poor fellows most likely did not even have life-belts along. I imagined their frantic but vain efforts to plug both ends of the bass tuba so that it might float and serve as a life-raft. This failing, I beheld with the blood-shot eye of my mind, the thirty-seven heroes all struggling in concentric circles to lay a hand on the buoyant bass drum.

In vain! Down goes the doctor of philosophy who performs so divinely upon the piccolo. Their last gasps bubble up from the lips of the plumber who plays the bassoon and the tutor who tootles the flute. For the third and last time the commanding head of Lieutenant Fisher emerges from the foam commanding his merry men to swim *allegro vivace*, while his baton arm rhythmically caresses old ocean's gray and melancholy waist. . . .

Wild-eyed I hunted up the quartermaster lieutenant in charge of unloading operations, and persuaded him to send out an inquiry to the Leviathan regarding the whereabouts of the band. He was a good fellow and consented at once. According to him it was a perfectly simple matter. He would merely telephone to the Naval Station, which would flash the message by Morse code to another place, which would pass it on to a dreadnought. And the dreadnought would flash it out to the Leviathan. It was all as easy as A B C. The answer would be back in twenty minutes' time.

Two hours and a half dragged their slow length along. No answer. We telephoned, and the Naval Station vaguely but optimistically reported progress. It was two in the morning and we were to entrain at five-thirty. We flashed out another and more imperative inquiry. At length that great, slow-moving body, the Leviathan, responded. It was an ambiguous message, saying that the band had just left. It did not say which band or what pier it was bound for. But the lieutenant explained that there were only two possible docks at which it could land and he was positive that there was no lighter *en route* to either of these docks. He said he ought to know about that if anybody on earth did, as he was the ranking officer in charge of docking facilities. By a process of elimination, the 313th Infantry band must still be on board the Leviathan.

There was only one thing to do. I extorted a small tug from the authorities, climbed precariously over the mountainous cargoes of three freighters waiting to be unloaded, swung down a chain into the tug, with difficulty aroused the French skipper and his crew; and, in no more time than it takes to get sleepy and reluctant Frenchmen limbered up and launched into a full tide of activity, we were off.

There was room in the cabin for only ten men packed close; and I spent my force figuring out where to accommodate a band of thirty-seven souls, supposing them not to have been on one of the lighters that had drifted out to sea. For large waves were breaking over the scanty deck above. And where should I dispose the bass drum out of the wet?

We drew alongside the huge cliff of Leviathan, and I tackled the deck officer. He thought my band had left, but was not sure how or when or why or to what end. I thought of recommending to that band, if I ever caught it, to adopt as its motto those lines of Omar Kháyyám's:

> "What, without asking, hither hurried *Whence?*
> And, without asking, *Whither* hurried hence!"

But then I recollected that the stanza ended in a resolution to indulge in

> "Full many a cup of this forbidden wine";

and it occurred to me that it might perhaps be better for regularity of rhythm, and purity of intonation in public performance, not to bring these encouraging words to their attention.

At a moment's notice it is a difficult thing to lay your hands on thirty-seven dreamy, unpractical, and retiring musicians in a ship whose war-time capacity is fourteen thousand souls. Beginning with the officers higher up, and progressing methodically to those lower down, I woke up all the naval dignitaries, one by one.

Like true knights errant of the sea, they were all dignified and courteous, once they had dug the sand out of their eyes. But none of them knew anything definite about the 313th band except that it had played very agreeably during the voyage. Of this fact I was already aware. And as I was now hungry and thirsty and a bit on edge, I had some ado to restrain myself from pointing out that my knowledge along this line equaled theirs in every respect.

I woke up the men of the band of another regiment of the 79th Division which had not yet disembarked. (I thought I could distinguish the bandsmen from the less æsthetic doughboys because they snored with greater sonority and sweetness, and because their combined efforts blended into one mighty barbershop chord which came nearer to being the lost chord than anything I have since heard.) I asked them what had become of the 313th band. Wakened thus abruptly in the small hours, they had some difficulty in deciding whether this was to-night, last night, or to-morrow. But they finally agreed that my band had left the evening before. They could, however, supply none of those precise details for which my soul yearned.

I woke up their colonel. He heaved aloft his pink-spotted pyjamas, pondered darkly for a space of time, and then swore softly to himself.

"Well," he finally said, "I'm an old West-Pointer and I've heard of mislaying everything in the United States Army from a firing-pin to a field kitchen; — but I'll be —— —— if I ever heard of mislaying a military band!"

Then he pulled the blankets over his head and morosely prepared to relapse into slumber. As I departed I could hear him mutter:

"Lost a band! Well, I'll be ——!"

Finally, from one of the stokers in the hold I definitely learned, with impressive concrete details, that different sections of the 313th band had left that night at eight and nine-thirty in two coal barges. Destination unknown.

On this I climbed back into the tug, aroused the French nation, and combined a nice cool shower up on deck with watching the early dawn streak the surface of that marvelous harbor. If I had been in a properly receptive frame of mind I would doubtless have received some very æsthetic impressions.

"That's bad!" exclaimed my lieutenant of the port when I told him the stoker's story; "I never thought of those coal barges. Your band is probably, at this moment, five miles away down the harbor, hopelessly stymied. Here it is, four-thirty, and only an hour left before your entrainment. With the fastest truck I have, you could n't possibly get out there and back in an hour through the mess you'd have to negotiate."

At that crucial moment, had I for an instant lost control, I would have begun to gobble like a turkey and to run up the walls. Never before so clearly had I recognized the wonderfully expressive power of that vulgar phrase, "to beat the band," in connoting superlative states of longing or passion. In a superlative degree I now passionately longed to beat the band of the 313th Infantry, A.E.F.

"There's only one hope left," said I. "That stoker, like everybody else, may have been wrong. I'll call up the railroad station again on the chance."

I had never liked the telephone much. But that morning I experienced a change of heart toward it. And if the Signal Corps had only been thoughtful enough to run a wire out from the port to the so-called "Rest Camp," I probably should never have another word to say against that instrument of torture, though I lived to be older than the Father of Lies who had distributed his offspring so plentifully about the city of Brest.

"Hello, hello! Yes, the 313th band have just arrived. I can see them now through my window, sitting on their instruments in the yard. Yes, yes, I see both the bass drum and the big bass tuba. They look intact. Talk with Fisher? Why, certainly. Hold the wire."

Then Fisher, whose generalship I had so groundlessly mistrusted, explained to me in a voice faint from exhaustion, that, in obedience to orders, he had taken the band from the Leviathan at nine-thirty the previous evening on a different lighter than had ever been heard of by me or by the port lieutenant; had landed at an unknown dock that was far out of our combined kens, and had spent the entire night of my anxious researches marching like the king of France and thirty-seven men, up the hill to the "Rest Camp," then turning around with the outfit and marching down again, dragging the bass drum and the tuba in his wake.

Nunc dimittis! I had the band and I had the grub and I had the five-thirty, too.

Sequel: After the armistice Fisher found himself in Brest, with General Pershing's limousine at his disposal. He lay back in the soft cushions and lit a fat cigar. "The Rest Camp, James," he murmured.

CHAPTER IX

FIDDLER'S MAGIC

DURING my whole service in France up to the day when I arose from the cot in Base Hospital Fourteen and began to hobble, I had only one fiddling adventure.

My regiment spent some time in the town of Champlitte, training for the front lines. So far as we were aware, Champlitte possessed but a single bathtub. You dropped into the bathing establishment every time you passed that way, and once during the course of several weeks you probably were fortunate enough to find the tub hospitably vacant.

Now, I had known about cleanliness being next to godliness. France showed me that it was but one remove from the divine art of fiddling. One day I called to make the usual tender inquiries after the bathtub's condition. I was informed that it was doing better than was to be expected under the circumstances, and that if I would honor a chair in the next room for a little bit with my distinguished presence, facilities for cleanliness would soon be at my disposal. I was ushered into the family parlor.

The first thing that I saw on entering was a 'cello. It was suffering from anæmia, dandruff, recessive gums, and that form of acute St. Vitus's dance in the lumbar regions known as "Pernicious Wolf Tone"; but it was still a 'cello. Of course I picked it up and began to play.

In rushed *Madame*, clasping her hands as if in ecstasy. In waddled *Grand'mère,* not in any ecstasy, but flying signals of extreme content. In tornadoed a small boy and began to cavort about my chair, like a young puppy, wild with jubilation on being released from long captivity and offered a juicy bone.

I inquired if the bath were ready.

"Ah, *M. le Lieutenant*, but first we entreat you to play some more! You cannot know how we have starved for our dear music during these sad years when no one has had the heart to play. But now it is different. Thanks to *messieurs les Américains* we are about to achieve the victory."

I asked what they wanted to hear, and they wanted the "Méditation" from "Thaïs," which brought back sad memories of my quarrel with Priscilla, copious extracts from "Faust," Massenet's "Élégie," the "Berceuse" from "Jocelyn" and the Sextet from "Lucia." These I dutifully rendered while my audience caressed the music with their eyes. *Madame* slipped out for a moment and returned with a bottle of her choicest wine. *Grand'mère* cut me a bunch of delicious grapes from the arbor outside the door.

I was not allowed to bathe until I had given young Antoine, the 'cello's owner, some pointers on how to manipulate his property. While I splashed, the earnest *garçon* kept running in with eager inquiries about how to bow a chord, how to make the C string stay at C without slipping down to zero every few moments, and how to gain the rare altitude of the fourth position without slipping into a crevasse.

When all was said and done and bathed, I had much ado to make *Madame* accept compensation. Regarding the wine and the grapes she was adamant. Had I not brightened their lives and given them all a foretaste of the peacetime coming? Any moment I wanted to play that 'cello to my friends, Antoine should carry it for me to whatever point I might designate. For it was not meet and right that an officer should bemean his honored uniform by carrying so bulky and plebeian a parcel.

Now it happened that I did want to fiddle elsewhere; for I had found a pianist in almost as singular a fashion as I had found a 'cello. I had found the 'cello on the way to a bath. And I had found the pianist on the way to a dentist.

It all began with the texture and consistency of the A.E.F. bread. This form of the staff of life was durably constructed of ironwood. It was of so firm a substance that only teeth of Bessemer steel fitted with diamond points could have bitten it month in, month out, and remained intact. Mine, being made of merely mortal enamel and a very painful substance they call pulp, rained fillings like the hail that plagued Egypt, and cried "*Kamerad!*" and had to be taken to the hospital.

But when they arrived there the dentist looked sheepish and confessed that all his tools had been sent to France in the heavy freight, along with the 'cello the regiment had bought me, and had probably shared the same fate at the hands of the submarines — or whatever it is that submarines do their dirty work with. Unless he hitched my tooth to a wire and the other end of the wire to a bullet, and pulled the trigger and shot the bullet forth into space, he could not help my tooth out. I explained that filling, not extraction, more pulp rather than less, was my ideal. But he had not a single tool, and could not say when he could get his hands upon any.

My little affair was urgent and I was unwilling to let the matter rest there. I started forth to find him some of the murderous instruments of his profession. It soon developed that all the local French tooth-doctors were at the front and, unlike our own, had all their tools with them.

Hold! One of them had been killed in action. Perhaps the widow possessed his outfit. I hastened to the address and found a delightful lady who owned a large and representative memorial collection of dental forceps (from which I involuntarily recoiled), and a charming daughter who produced no such effect upon me.

This young woman, indeed, played the piano remarkably handily. I revealed my own weakness for operating upon the 'cello. We accordingly laid our plans with affectionate minuteness as to what we would make happen if a 'cello could be discovered. But it never was, until the day I finally found the bathtub empty.

The very next evening I summoned Antoine with his poor, suffering old bull-fiddle, and *Mademoiselle* and I gave ourselves and the family a concert. She did not have any music anywhere but in her head. But she had so much there that we performed all the evening without once repeating ourselves. At first she played, like ninety-nine pianists out of a hundred, a bit heavily. But she made me feel like the lord of creation when I murmured in her ear, "Let it be light," and it *was* light. If only my youthful lady-love Priscilla, I sadly reflected, had been as amenable to suggestion as this *mademoiselle*, how differently our lives might have turned out! Also, if only I could get Priscilla out of my mind, how much more amenable I would be to the charms of the *mademoiselles*. It was a vicious circle and my mind became so involved in it that I played an atrociously wrong note very loud, and came to earth with a crash and realized with whom I was playing.

Like most of her country-women, and like most of the English and other peoples who had been at war long enough to find a full outlet for all their pent-up energies and passions, this girl had no prejudice against German music; so we alternated Debussy with Beethoven and Franck with Bach to everybody's satisfaction. And afterwards, when I took Antoine's 'cello over to the American Officers' Club and played until midnight, there was the same feeling that art is international and that to cut off German music is no wiser than cutting off your own nose to spite your face.

It was interesting to notice that this feeling grew much more pronounced in my regiment after we had been under fire. As a rule I found that the front-line fighting man had little or no prejudice against German music. He had translated into action and worked out of his system that pent-up spleen which so ate into the vitals of the S.O.S. and of the good folks at home.

His idea was somewhat as follows: "Let's lap up everything good that we can get out of those miserable Boches and enjoy it to the limit. That's the least we can do to get even for the rats and the mud, the bombs, the forced marches, the hospitals, the cold, and the cooties." So he consumed a German tune with the same gusto that he showed in sampling the cigars and *Schnapps* he found in the captured dugout. I consider this a healthier state than being poisoned by the ingrowing morbidness of the non-combatants.

Feeling against German music appeared to increase in direct proportion to the agitator's distance from Germany. I remember that it was a telephone girl in the rearest of the rear who based her abhorrence of German music on the highly original ground that it was bad music. Triumphantly she backed up this contention with the syllogism:

"Music is goodness;
The German is not good;
Therefore the German is not musical."

Naturally I forbore to invert this extraordinary proposition and come back with:

"Music is goodness;
The German is musical;
Therefore the German is good," —

for I did not in the least think so myself. I merely inquired of her in the mildest of tones whether Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms were, then, unmusical. In the engaging manner of so many cornered ladies, she resorted at once to invective. With wrath flashing from her eyes she denounced me as a disgrace to the uniform I wore.

It was clear that my views on the art of music had not made a hit with the telephone girl. I told myself that you can't please any one with everything any more than you can please every one with anything. But this philosophical reflection did little toward cheering me. For then and there I perceived that when I stopped shooting the Boches and being shot at by them, and went home, I would have to choose between disliking Beethoven, and being shot at by a considerable body of non-combatants.

This was a painful dilemma. For, in going over the top, it was Beethoven and other Boches of his sort who kept such nice, encouraging tunes going all the time in my head, that they made the whizz-bangs and the blind pigs and the bombs and bullets sound much less dismaying than they might have otherwise sounded. These good Teutonic musicians released more of my energies toward the great end of making more present-day Germans good, that is, dead. It was a droll thing to catch Brahms in the act of helping me kill his compatriots; for in my rather exposed solo position as Assistant Regimental Intelligence Officer during an attack, I found no more helpful aide than the composer of the "Triumphlied."

My chief recollection of music in the trenches is of the wedding hymns which the highly uxorious rats of Verrières sang as they performed Russian *ballets* on the corrugated iron of my superterranean dugout, and used my face as a springboard for the high dive. So I am not going to say much of anything about fiddler's magic at the front because it was conspicuous by its absence.

Stay! There was one rare specimen of a fiddler — well, perhaps not exactly a fiddler, but, anyway, a magician — who went into the Meuse–Argonne offensive with us before Montfaucon, sitting up on top of his tank with the shells bursting about him at reasonable distances and intervals. All this time he kept twanging a disreputable banjo and singing at the top of a gay and lusty voice — till one of the shells put a sudden and final double-bar to the music. The little incident reminded me of that line of Kipling's:

> "You could n't pack a Broadwood half a mile";

and what follows in praise of the banjo as a military instrument.

My beloved Brahms was the best of bunkies and buddies right up to the moment when the Boche sniper in the tree got me through the hip bone. And he stayed with me during the hours of jolting back on the stretcher borne by willing but awkward amateurs. And he stayed with me all the time that very elastic Ford ambulance was cavorting back *Andante con motor*, through the shell-holes to the Field Hospital.

It was one of those high-brow ambulances that have no use for low gear. Low, in fact, was burned out. So every time we struck a shell-hole, Henry Ford gave a last gasp and had eventually (we asked ourselves, "Why not now?") to be propelled by hand to the crest of the next hill. Those hours might have been an unpleasant experience if it had not been for that double-distilled extract of fiddler's magic represented by the Brahms sextets. Henry might shake me until I was all hip, but, in the words of the ancient song, those darling old comrades the (sextets) were there by my side.

CHAPTER X

THE "ATLANTIC" SUPPLIES ME WITH TOOTH-PASTE

THE two days in the Field Hospital were over; likewise the two days in the Evacuation Hospital at Souilly. Dead and done were the two days in the filthy French cattle-car where you lay with another wounded officer six inches above your nose, tended by a picturesque old ruffian named Philippe who knew but one word of English. At last the stretchers jolted us into a long, chilly paradise of clean sheets and real American girls, who gave us baths and cups of cocoa.

We were in luck. All the hospitals were full. Those who were wounded after us must take their chances of lying on the dry side of a hedge in the cold rain.

The surgeon major came through with his bunch of catalogue cards, the Who's Who of Ward Four. He paused beside my bed, ran his finger over them, picked one out, read it, and glanced at me with a sharp look.

I could hear him murmur my name to himself, and then, "Born in Austria."

Suspicion was plainly dawning in the major's eyes. Already I foresaw myself marked down as a possible spy and carried out and laid under a hedge to make room for some Captain John Smith born in Topeka. There was a look of bigoted conviction about that major, which told me how useless it would be to explain that three of my four grandparents had been Plymouth Rock Yankees, and that the fourth, he who had thoughtlessly endowed me with my too Teutonic name, had been an American citizen. When they are hot on the trail of spies, the higher army officers do not bother much with listening to such fine-drawn and subtle distinctions as these. I could almost hear this train of logic forming itself in the major's mind:

"His name is German;
He was born in Austria;
Therefore he must be a spy."

I braced myself for the conflict, looked at the major and prepared to speak. But, as I did so, his expression changed. All at once a flash of eager curiosity replaced the look of hostile suspicion.

"Look here," he said, "you don't happen to come, do you, from that family of American missionaries that was born all over creation?"

"Yes, sir."

The major grew excited.

"Is the ordnance captain with the six sons any relative of yours?"

"My brother."

The major's hand shot out.

"Put it there, old man! Charlie's about the best friend I have in the world. Why, I just operated on two of his boys before coming abroad."

"Yes, and now they're both serving in France along with three other nephews of mine."

"Look here, what relation are you to the chap who writes about fiddlers and things in the 'Atlantic'?"

In a subdued voice, for fear of losing caste with my brother officers in the neighboring beds, I explained the nature of my relationship to that slave of the quill.

The major seemed taken aback.

"Good Heavens!" he cried. "And to think that I was just on the point of denouncing you as a spy!"

Again he shook me warmly by the hand and told me that he had all my books in his library.

This was a double surprise. First, not to be treated as a spy when all the indications pointed that way. Second, to be reminded that I had once written books. For the last year that fact had been entirely wiped out of my consciousness by the all-expunging eraser of urgent military affairs.

"My colleague the medical major must know of this at once," exclaimed my new friend. "He has often mentioned your stuff to me. He is a faithful 'Atlantic' reader, and you will find him a bang-up musical amateur."

He hurried away and in a few moments

brought back a person whom I shall always regard as one of the largest-souled and warmest-hearted of all my friends. The medical major's first words to me were wholly characteristic of the man:

"What can I get you?"

Any soldier who has ever traveled a couple of hundred miles by slow freight between wound and base hospital will know how welcome these words sounded. All honor to the dauntless ambulance drivers and the compassionate hospital orderlies. But how they could steal! By the time I reached the base I had lost everything I possessed except the clothes on my back and my automatic pistol. And every single driver who flivved me, and every single orderly who tended me, had tried his best to steal that Savage.

I had preserved it for posterity only by lying continuously upon it. Uncomfortable, of course, but the only sure way. If that Savage had possessed any of the properties of an egg, or I of a hen, I would, before reaching Base Fourteen, have hatched out a considerable flock of little Savages. My success in keeping the weapon was extraordinary. Nineteen officers in my ward out of twenty had been relieved of their pistols early in the game, and had had their money belts rifled as soon as they went under ether in the Field Hospital.

"What can I get you?" asked that blessed major.

"Tooth-paste, a toothbrush, and a sweater," I replied without an instant's hesitation.

He nodded and returned in half an hour carrying a khaki kit-bag crammed with all these, and such additional luxuries as socks, dental floss, handkerchiefs, cigarettes, a comb, and writing-materials. Praised be his name!

The medical major used to drop in and sit down on my bed for a chat at least twice a day. I found him a very intelligent amateur musician, and our mouths would water as we talked of historic performances we had heard by the Chicago Orchestra, the Flonzaleys, the Olive Meads, Bauer and Gabrilowitch, and how jolly it would be if we two might play the Franck sonata together — for the major eventually proved to be a very able pianist.

"Just wait till you can hobble," he would say. "Then I'll dig you up some sort of a 'cello, and we'll have fun."

The first thing this good Samaritan did, as soon as I could move about, was to place his own private room at my disposal during the daytime. It was a god-send. The long hours of solitude with his library of French novels proved to be an even more delicious luxury than the sheets had been, on emerging from the cattle-car.

Now, I like my kind passing well. But for a year and a half I had lived continuously, day and night, in their immediate presence. And such is the tyranny of the musical ear that there had been no possibility of ever indulging in my own thoughts if any of the comrades were singing, whistling, playing the phonograph, or snoring — and they were nearly always doing one or the other. All the chinks, of course, were filled in with profanity of the first order. There is something musical about a good curse if well performed. And the sound of profanity was never still in the A.E.F.

Sometimes, when the audible world has been too much with me, I have thought that the utopian type of universal democracy enjoined by such enthusiasts as Walt Whitman must be rather easier for unmusical folk to attain and maintain. People whose ears are not particularly sensitive have a gross advantage. Sight, smell, taste, and touch can get along in almost any crowd with kindliness and geniality. You can overlook or underlook ugliness of feature, or deliberately close your eyes to it. You can light a cigar or invoke perfume against an evil odor. Unless you fall among cannibals or into the A.E.F., you are rarely obliged to outrage your palate. As for rubbing elbows with the crowd, I for one have seldom rubbed an elbow that did not give me an interesting wireless message, revealing things about the owner's personality that he perhaps did not himself know.

But as for the chap who whistles between his teeth, or sings out of tune, or twangs a degenerate guitar with wire-loose strings in the next bed for twelve hours a day, while expressing in a cracked voice a Freudian wish for "a girl just like the girl that married dear old dad" — it is passing hard for the musician to keep on loving him in the fraternal manner recommended by "Leaves of Grass." Fiddlers and such are out of luck.

This fact used to sadden me until I happened to stumble one day upon the poem in which Whitman tried to write in a sophisticated manner about the art of music. There I found him lavishing his praises upon "Italia's peerless compositions," especially "the trombone duo" in "Ernani," and discovered that those third-raters Rossini and Meyerbeer were just about Walt's top speed in a musical manner of speaking. That discovery made me easier in my mind. Anybody who felt thus would naturally experience no difficulty in pouring out unstinted floods of love upon the man who for twelve hours a day audibly yearned for a girl according to Freud. But there was evidently something wrong with the good gray poet's ears.

Personally, I do not believe that he was very much more musical than a certain one of the nine directors of the late Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra was giving a summer concert at the country club, while this gentleman was entertaining a party of friends, and they found some difficulty in making themselves heard above the sounds of the symphony. He called the waiter at length, and said: "Waiter, go to Mr. Bernthaler, the man who is waving the stick up there, and tell him to play in a minor key so we can hear each other talk."

I think this gentleman would have fitted admirably into old Walt's democratic Utopia. To be a really hearty Whitmaniac you either must have rather blunt senses, or the power to disregard the superficial, and, by an act of divination, pierce far below the surface and appreciate the essential truth, goodness, and beauty hidden there. Only, if you are anything of a musician, it is so much easier to *see* beauty beneath ugliness than to hear it!

Therefore, when the medical major crowned his royal gift of tooth-paste, et cetera, by lending me his room and his oil stove, it was passing pleasant to escape suddenly into the possibility of resuming my old habits of quiet reflection — to evoke my auto-comrade again, and after shaking him cordially by the hand and slapping him on the back, find out what he had been up to all this time since I entered Plattsburg and gave him the go-by.

Sometimes the major would drop in for a few moments of chat between his tireless rounds, and we would talk real talk. Whenever I began to thank him for his kindness he would always shut me up in a determined and flattering manner, saying that he was an "Atlantic" reader and had to get even with me for various pleasant quarters of an hour.

Before long, when I could walk two hundred yards, the major told me to go and consult the ear doctor in the neighboring hospital.

"But," I objected, "there's nothing wrong with my ears."

The major over-rode me.

"Yes, there is! As your superior officer I command you to see Lieutenant F. and tell him you play the 'cello. He'll give you something that will help you."

So I made my way, in a puzzled state, over to Base Thirty-Five and sat around in Lieutenant F.'s clinic and watched him do complicated and skillful things to the ears of many a doughboy. Finally he said:

"Now, Loot, I'll treat you."

I eyed his murderous array of cutlery with considerable conservatism. But, instead of cutting me up, he took off his apron, washed his hands, and led the way to his sleeping-quarters. The first thing I saw there showed me how the Ear Man was going to treat me. It was a 'cello that dangled by the neck from a nail in the door, like the spy that the surgeon major had not taken me for.

I fell upon it with loud, carnivorous cries. The Ear Man immediately produced a flute fron the bureau drawer; and we began, without a second's hesitation, on that time-honored duet known as Titl's "Serenade."

When the Ear Man's wind failed, I recalled the fact that I had breathed practically my first infant breath into the flute. So we swapped instruments and did "La Paloma." By this time we had amassed a large and encouraging audience of medical men in the little room and they demanded a program ranging all the way from "Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight" to "Nearer My God to Thee," which last selection, I impolitely pointed out to them, might more appropriately be played to their patients.

All this time my subconsciousness was busy with the fact that I had not touched a 'cello since before the flood. I enjoyed the pleasantly piquant contrast between the feel of barbed wire and automatic triggers and the more novel but agreeable texture of wire strings and a 'cello bow.

Mess-call sounding, the audience insisted that we adjourn with our instruments and serenade the assembled officers. The incident turned out to be all the more enjoyable when the commandant of "Thirty-Five" discovered that he was a friend of my eldest brother, the medical corps colonel, and informed me that this brother had recently arrived in France and was stationed only sixty kilometers away.

Then I hobbled across the railroad tracks with the Ear Man's 'cello. The medical major beamed when he saw it.

"Ah, that's what my nurses are keen to hear. I've told them about you and the treatment I prescribed. Won't you play to them to-night at their club?"

"Yes, sir, if you'll accompany me."

The kind major's face fell an octave.

"Three of my poor boys are probably going West before morning. I can't possibly leave them. But did n't I hear you say that you had found a pianist in your ward?"

I had, indeed! It had come about in this way: In a bed halfway down the hall lay a captain from my own regiment. One afternoon I had heard somebody whistling Chopin softly to himself, and whistling it excellently well. I sat up and traced the sound to Captain V. Then I whistled an answering strain. He was as surprised as I had been.

To offset the tedium of hospital life we developed a musical contest of sorts. One of us would start a melody, and if the other one could not take it up wherever it stopped, the starter would score one. If he could, however, he got the jump on the other fellow. The officers in the intervening bunks disregarded our soft pipings as things foreign to their natures.

But one day, when one of us was scoring heavily on a Brahms symphony, a pair of lips at the far end of the ward took up the tale with elegance and precision. The captain and I jerked our heads about in surprise, and discovered this unexpected source of Brahms to be Major W., ranking patient of the ward, the man with the shrapnel hole in his hip.

In high excitement I pulled on bathrobe and slippers and made my way down the aisle. After half an hour's conversation I knew that I had discovered a musical amateur twenty-one karats fine. His memory for melodies was all-compendious; his taste was like refined gold, and he played the piano.

He had played almost everything in chamber music. Of course, I would not know how well he played until I heard him put finger to key. As far as untried pianists were concerned I had outlived the period when the wish was father to the belief. I was no longer such a radiant optimist as the penniless man who entered the best restaurant in town and ordered a sumptuous dinner, with champagne and several other wines, hoping to find in one of the oysters a pearl that would pay the check. A long series of disillusioning experiences, beginning with Priscilla, had reduced my credulity to the vanishing point. It had taught me that ninety-nine pianists out of every hundred play the mouth-organ better than they do the piano. But of course there was always the chance that Major W. might prove to be number 100. He did.

When I came to him that evening and showed him the Ear Man's 'cello and said that the nurses were keen for some music, and did he feel able to get as far as the club and accompany me a bit, he painfully dragged on his clothes, crowned all with a leathern jerkin (for his very blouse had been stolen by some ambulance driver who was no respecter of rank), and we hobbled forth through the deep mud for which the Mars Hospital Center was notorious.

Before I had time to strip off the Ear Man's 'cello's overcoat, Major W. lurched at the keys like a starving man at a Thanksgiving dinner — and the heavens were opened. What was that wonderful piece he was playing? It began like a sort of cross between Ropartz and Reger. But after a few bars I could have sworn that it was some master work of Franck that had somehow escaped my ears until that moment. Pretty soon it sounded like a great but unknown piece by Bach, and then it turned into a mighty four-part fugue such as Beethoven ought to have written, but never got around to.

"What on earth is that?" I half shouted when the major crashed the final chord.

"Oh, just a little thing that occurred to me."

I gasped.

"You don't mean that you improvised it?"

I had heard it said that there was only one musician alive who could improvise really well, and he always improvised on the same theme. But this revelation was beginning to make me doubt it.

"Yes," said he in a matter-of-fact tone. "Now, let's have a look at your music."

It had not occurred to me until then, but there was no music.

"Never mind," said the major. "What are a few printed sheets between friends? Let's find out what the audience would like to hear."

The head nurse said: "The Bach Air in D, Major," and the major played that exacting accompaniment out of his head with a caressing, delicate touch and a meticulous exactitude which showed me that he was the fabulous golden accompanist at the foot of the rainbow, and that I had at length caught up to him.

A tall blonde insisted on being carried back to old Virginny, and the major variegated the journey with new and richer harmonies, and a playfully contrapuntal bass.

Then the good angel we affectionately termed "The Corporal," she who had given us that memorable bath when we emerged from the cattle-car encrusted with all the strata of geologic France, demanded Wagner. And we rendered right lustily Siegfried's Rhine Journey, the Grail Procession, the Good Friday Spell, Siegmund's Love Song and a large part of the "Tannhäuser" and "Meistersinger" overtures.

To please little Miss Fluffy Ruffles, we coquetted with Dvořák's "Humoresque," while the major found extra fingers enough to render "The Old Folks at Home" at the same time — an excellently successful musical marriage.

Then, after doing a lot of the third Beethoven sonata at the request of that very creative listener, the surgeon major, who had dropped in during the marriage ceremony, we played nearly all the works of Stephen Foster and the allied national airs, not even forgetting poor Russia, my colleague improvising the while the most stunningly florid, figurated basses and the most gorgeous new harmonies that a national air ever tried on like an Easter bonnet.

Thereupon the surgeon major sternly drove us to bed, on the principle that casualties must not get over-ambitious. And he actually insisted on carrying that 'cello with his own hands back through the mud to the Ear Man. He declared that he felt so jubilant over meeting up with fiddler's magic again after all those months that, were it not for the geography of the pianist's wound and my own, he would feel like shouting:

"Hip, hip, hooray!"

And thus it was that my old friend the "Atlantic" when things came to the pinch, procured me: tooth-paste, solitude, a sweater, companionship, socks, and fiddler's magic.

CHAPTER XI

HOBBLES WITH A 'CELLO

A FEW days after this, the medical major, bless his kind heart! came and sat down on the edge of my cot in the hospital and whispered:

"I've just happened to find out that the commanding officer of this hospital group is an enthusiastic musical amateur and wants to hear you play."

"All right; only you know what the Ear Man's 'cello is like."

"The C.O. has a scheme. As the dwarf in the William J. Locke book might say, he has evolved a 'gigantic combination.'"

"What is it?"

"Well, some members of the French Homes movement in an old provincial city only a few hours from here are going to establish a club for wounded American officers. They have taken over the best clubhouse in town, and the inmates will pay for rooms and breakfasts there and will lunch and dine themselves in the hotel hard-by. I understand that there's a Stradivarius 'cello in the city."

"Sounds agreeable."

"It does. The C.O. suggests that, as soon as your wound allows, it would be jolly if you picked out three or four of your most congenial friends here and went over on convalescent leave, as the first incumbents of this new old soldiers' home, to start things. Then you might get hold of that Strad, and the C.O. and I would run over some fine afternoon and hear the results."

This made easy listening. It was a "gigantic combination" which would appeal to the higher instincts of any musical vagabond on earth. Accordingly I sounded the improvising major and the whistling captain and a couple of lieutenant friends of the creative listener variety. They all thought as highly of the combination as I did. It would, indeed, be a welcome change from the monotonous mud and the monotonous fare and the monotonous drab featurelessness of hospital life, even though we had been more fortunate than all other casualties by reason of having landed in the Chicago University Unit.

We airily waved aside the two majors' parting injunctions not to tire ourselves out. When we arrived in the great hall of the club with the open fire and the billiard table and the piano and the warm-hearted French ladies, we would have executed a jubilant jig if we had been foot-free. The improvising major flung himself down on the piano stool in his leathern jerkin and improvised a pæan of relief and rejoicing which seemed at the time, and still seems in retrospect, a worthy companion to Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy."

True to my inflexible principles whenever I enter a strange city, 'celloless, and with time on my hands, I at once asked our extremely gracious and aristocratic arch-hostess if she knew who owned the best 'cello in town, and mentioned the rumor about the Strad.

"I regret, *monsieur*," she replied, "the

Stradivarius has departed since four years. But if you will come with me I shall find you a good violoncello."

She led the way down a crooked little street and knocked at a door. It was flung open by the mistress of the house, a woman with large, mournful, mysterious eyes and a halo of frizzy black hair.

"Here," explained my hostess with a certain condescension, "is an American officer who desires for the time being an Italian 'cello to make music on."

"Ah," exclaimed Madame R. politely, "to *les Américains* we can deny nothing!"

She ushered me through her music-room into a small alcove. There, sitting solemnly up around the walls in their black coffins, I beheld not one, but a whole family of 'cellos.

"Select which you desire, *monsieur*."

I said that she was thrice amiable, tried all the family and picked out a splendid old Italian, mellow and sonorous, that responded with enthusiasm to the lightest touch of the bow.

"Is there any music in town?"

The fairy godmother threw open a huge cupboard built into the wall. I gasped with the magnitude of my good fortune. There lay practically the whole literature of the 'cello.

"Take what you will!" urged *Madame*.

On that I remembered Major W.'s health. Immediately after his improvisation he had gone to bed with symptoms suspiciously like those of "flu." Six hours on the front seat of an ambulance in a raw wind had not made an auspicious start for his convalescence. I knew, for I had sat beside him. He must not be overtaxed. I felt that French hospitality, combined with reading at sight a few of these difficult modern sonatas for 'cello and piano, might lay him out horizontally for a long period.

"Now," I inquired, "is there, by good fortune, any pianist in town who can play these things?"

Madame sank upon the piano stool and at once began to play like an angel who had studied with all the best masters. It was the most heavenly piece that has ever been written for the piano, the Prelude, Aria, and Finale of César Franck.

When she was through I shook her by the hand with what would have been tears if I had not been an Anglo-Saxon, and humbly begged the privilege of doing a sonata with her some time.

"Why not to-night?" said she, as one to whom all things were possible.

And I came. Never before or since have I played with a pianist who possessed the secret of French chamber music as Madame R. possessed it. And the sportsmanship of her! There was this brave woman, this great artist, struggling with fate in the thick obscurity of the provinces, teaching young children the piano at three depreciated francs an hour, in order to support her own three little ones, while her 'cellist husband drove an artillery *camion* at the front.

So remarkable was her talent that she ought to have been known all over the civilized world.

And yet she insisted on giving up two hours' worth of pupils each day so that she might play sonatas, in inter-allied gratitude, with the *officier américain.* And she steadfastly and proudly resisted all offers to put things upon a professional basis and let me pay her.

"One does not take money from one's allies!" she exclaimed.

After some of the recent experiences of the A.E.F. this sentiment had a somewhat original and quixotic sound. But then, she was a musician. And musicians, and people like that, I have been told, are always a bit queer.

The third day I took to a bed beside the major. The good ladies of the French Homes Committee had been so solicitous that we should have a good, sociable, edifying time, that, what with dinners, teas, and personally conducted tours of the town, the cathedral, and the art museum, they had almost killed us with kindness. But from the vantage-ground of bed, it was possible to arrange for a concert on the last day of our stay, when the C.O. and the good medical major would run over for a little music.

They ran. I emerged from bed to play a couple of pieces and crawl back whence I came. But not before the C.O. had murmured in my ear that I was to make up for lost time by spending another week in the *Cercle Américain.*

In a couple of days, more fortunate than the improvising major who only exchanged bed for ambulance, I arose and resumed my researches into French chamber music with Madame R. It was then that the aristocratic committee sought to induce me to change pianists. Though, as they said, they knew very little about music, they held strong views as to what was right and proper in every sphere of human activity. They did not quite approve of one of their Americans fiddling indiscriminately outside of their own set, when they were able to provide him with musical companions whose ancient lineage, commanding position in society, and historic musical affiliations rendered them more desirable to consort with than people who could merely play well. They were not so sure about Madame R. even playing well. They felt that, as this hard-working artist did not, like themselves, live and move and have her being exclusively among the nobility, her performances could not be quite up to the mark.

Finally they put down their highly arched feet and decreed that I was to play trios with a young marquis who condescended to toy with the fiddle, and a duchess who had once been a pupil of César Franck. This fact alone, they plainly felt, would prove clearly that she was musically far superior to Madame R.

I inquired whether this lady possessed the rare art of playing *piano* on the piano.

"Certainly! Is she not a pupil of César Franck?"

"Because," I warned them, "I am afflicted with a besetting sin. When a pianist becomes too muscular and persists in pounding, I am all too apt to address her in firm and uncompromising language. I fear that I have a slight neurosis in connection with noisy pianists, because I have suffered such things at their hands." Of course I was thinking of my unhappy affair with Priscilla, with the heart-sickness which that memory always gave me. Why could n't I forget her?

"Have no misgivings," they responded. "She is a pupil . . ."

Constrained by the obligations of guestpitality, I went, as in duty bound, but with an eagerness made dubious by long experience. The marquis was an adequate fiddler enough, who played out of tune only during the more difficult passages. The duchess was gracious and could not have been more aristocratic without serious consequences to her vertebræ.

She told authentic reminiscences of Franck, and showed how her old master used to come in out of the streets of Paris to give her a lesson, and would always hold out both his hands to be massaged by her into warmth and suppleness before sitting down to the piano.

I felt that the adventure looked promising.

The lady really had studied with that great master. She must be a wonder.

Then she sat down at the piano and we began the soft opening of a Mendelssohn trio.

Ye gods! What were those loud, strident sounds? I started painfully and glanced around at the duchess. The veins in her neck and muscular arms were standing out with exertion. She was putting her back into the *pianissimo* music. Halfway measures evidently did not appeal to this pupil of Franck. Worst of all, her right foot was planted solidly, as if for all time, on the sustaining pedal, so that the different chords "ran" like the hues of guaranteed fast-color pyjamas when they first enter the wash-tub.

"*Piano,* if you please," I suggested in the well-bred voice current in aristocratic circles.

The duchess caught my eye, nodded and smiled brightly — and kept on putting her back — and her foot — into it.

I began to lose control. Devastating memories of the many things I had suffered from pounding pianists swept over me, and of my countless vows of "never again!" The rear wheels of my temper began to skid. The duchess's playing possessed no pleasing qualities that could help atone for the horrors of its blurry volume. Her performance was stiff as a poker, yet with none of a poker's occasional warmth.

"*Piano,* I beg of you!" My intonation was now that of the *bourgeoisie.* The lady nodded, took a firmer grip than ever with her foot, and held on with determination. She sounded less like Mendelssohn than the Homestead rolling-mills.

"*Shsssssss! Pianissimo!*" I roared in the coarse accents of the proletariat, though scarcely making myself heard above the tumult.

"Certainly, *monsieur,*" screamed the female Samson, exerting her last ounce of strength on the keys and treading so heavily on that excrescence which I know it is vulgar to call the loud pedal, but which I really must be pardoned for so calling, this once — treading on it, I say, with such an elephantine finality that I began to entertain hopes of her putting it out of commission.

At last I understood why poor, dear old Papa Franck was represented by all his biographers as having so much hardship to bear — as so awfully harassed and tired out and generally pulled down by all the miscellaneous piano lessons he had to rush about Paris and give. I shuddered as I imagined the kindly old master's struggles against the self-satisfaction of the duchess, which, in its boundless sublimity, reminded me of George Sylvester Viereck, the poet who, it is said, regards Shakespeare as a premature Viereck.

The duchess had evidently taken as her dynamic motto, the watchword of Ibsen's hero, "Brand": "Everything or nothing!" That entire afternoon, everything was *fortissimo* that came to her mill. Her foot, planted firmly as the left fore hoof of General Sherman's bronze horse in the Plaza, New York City, never once quitted the loud pedal.

With huge relief I returned to the unforgettable little music-room where the family of 'cello coffins stood solemnly about in the alcove regarding their mistress, who, though not so far-famed among the nobility, still possessed a private key to music's holiest of holies, and introduced me into that magic shrine every day until I returned to the hospital.

But for long afterwards, in those recurrent nightmares which are the heritage of so many members of the A.E.F., I saw the duchess with her aristocratic hoof planted for all time on the burning pedal whence all but she had fled.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN IN PARIS —

I RETURNED to the mud of Mars with a large armful of borrowed music. And at last I had the pleasure of playing the Franck sonata with the good, kind medical major in the hospital officers' club. Heaven be praised! he did not play like a pupil of Franck at all, but had a self-denying right foot and operated the music machine delicately and rapidly by the touch system, like the true musician and true sport and regular fellow that he was. We planned to play it for the nurses after another rehearsal or so.

Meanwhile, among the enlisted men of the hospital I found two violinists and a viola player who was a talented young composer and a student at Yale for the degree of Doctor of Music.

We used to foregather in the medical major's room, grouped close about the oil stove, which we regarded as one of the most admirable institutions in Mars. And when we arrived at a certain pitch of perfection with a Beethoven minuet or a Mozart Andante, we would pick up our fiddles and our stands and adjourn to one of the wards to see whether the patients liked "deep stuff" better than ragtime on the eternal phonograph. They usually did.

Any time now, I expected to be discharged from hospital and sent back to the firing-line, for I no longer needed a stick, or even a 'cello, to aid locomotion. Every day or two I would ask one of the majors when he thought I could go back, and he would answer in an encouraging but evasive manner.

Finally, one day, the medical major approached me waving a sheet of paper and grinning.

"Sign here, Lieutenant," he said in the best sergeant-major style.

I looked it over. It was an application for a long convalescent leave to Nice! I began to protest, but he cut me short.

"Now, then, that sort of talk is no good. You've been well shaken up, and you'll not be fit to work for a long time yet. Why is n't it better for you to pull yourself together down on the Riviera, out of all this mud and rain and fog and away from all the germs, than to stick around Mars and catch the flu? Sign here, you idiot! And, by the way, the nurses insist on our playing for them next Monday night."

That concert, though, was forever averted by something a headquarters orderly mentioned in the ward on Monday morning, just as the daily wound-dressings began. A premonitory thrill flew down the long hall as the orderly cleared his throat and read:

"The commanding officer has just received the following official telegram: 'Firing will cease on all fronts at eleven o'clock this morning.'"

Shall I ever forget the tense, eloquent silence that followed this bald statement, or the look in all those eyes?

That evening the nurses gathered for the concert. But we, the performers, felt that this was not at all the right moment in the world's history to sit down and pay quiet attention to high-brow music. We might be musical, but we were only human.

We commandeered two large army trucks, gathered together a couple of squads of able-bodied officers for chaperons, and took the nurses in to the city of Nevers to see the celebration.

Nevers evidently had been looking upon the wine when it was red ever since 11 A.M., and had seen that it was good, and had looked upon it some more. There may have been one sober citizen in town, but we did not see him. And never did two truckloads of Americans have a more appreciative and responsive audience than the packed streets of Nevers for the inter-allied *chansons* which we delivered at the tops of our voices until our voices burst their tops off.

The next afternoon, the documents *in re* the leave to Nice arrived. I felt better about taking advantage of it, now that the war was out of the way. There was just time to partake of the glorious champagne dinner to which the medical major (may his name be ever green!) treated our ward. And then I packed my entire wardrobe in my little musette bag and started with a high heart for Paris.

Why Paris? All roads are said to lead to Rome. This did not hold true in the A.E.F. There all roads led to Paris.

In order to get from any one part of France to any other part of the world whatsoever, it was the fixed creed of the A.E.F. that you were sure to save time and trouble and increase your satisfaction with life — and your legitimate expenditures — if you went there *via* the most agreeable city in existence. Far was it from me to shatter an army tradition! Besides, I was curious to see how the Grands Boulevards were taking the most joyous event in history.

They did not disappoint me. They — but there! How they sang and danced and hurled confetti and rocked taxicabs off their foundations and dragged German ordnance frantically all over the place, and paraded and formed dancing rings about every doughboy so that he had to kiss his way out, and how they waylaid and embraced every American officer five hundred times a day — is it not written in the books of the chronicles of the A.E.F.?

So, because this is no war tale, I pass rapidly to the middle of that first afternoon when I had been taking a brief vacation from the frenzy of the Grands Boulevards in order to revisit some of the bright haunts of my early musical youth. I was just leaving a quarter closely identified with old chamber-music parties as jolly as any of the parties in Du Maurier's "Trilby," and was still wrapped in a tender melancholy by my discovery that the wonderful old music-room was now a phonograph shop — when I noticed a little group of girls waiting for a car. The youngest, a child of ten, carried a violin. Auspicious omen in that quarter! In keeping with the prevailing informal spirit of Franco-American amity, I hailed her in the lamest of French as a fellow fiddler.

In daintily quaint English she responded that, yes, indeed, she loved chamber music, and this was her sister who played the 'cello, and here, behold, another sister who sang, and, pointing out a young and charming member of the group, that was none else than her mother, who played the piano with inspiration.

A group of friendly and enthusiastic musical amateurs in my old haunts? The weather indications were indeed set fair.

I believe in signs, omens, and hunches. Whenever I feel something go click! in my soul and see the little pointer swing around and point, I usually start forth in the direction it indicates. And it scarcely ever has been known to lead me astray. This time the pointer came to rest in the direction of these musical amateurs. Mine not to reason why. Mine but to follow the arrow, no matter how audaciously I might be contravening the strict etiquette of the exclusive social circles to which it was evident that this family belonged.

I entered more deeply into conversation

with them and we went along together down to the Place de la Concorde, comparing notes about our respective quotas of fiddler's luck. With the great carbonated carnival throng there, we did homage to the gayly decorated statue of Strasbourg; and the girls pointed out to me those absurd and famous twin tutelary dolls, Nanette and Rintintin, which, in tiny replicas made of colored threads and worn in the lapel, had protected all true Parisians during the dark days now so gloriously done with — from the Berthas and the Gothas.

I invited the whole family to tea. But the mother had to take her youngest to a violin lesson. So then I invited the singer and the 'cellist to tea. The family threw up its united hands in holy horror. What! Take two *jeunes filles* out unchaperoned? Such things were simply not done in Paris.

But my little pointer held firm.

"*Madame,*" said I, "when in Rome do you do as the Romans do?"

"*Mais oui, monsieur.*"

"And when in America?"

"As the Americans, of course."

I waved my hand up the Rue de la Paix.

"*Madame*, what color predominates in this crowd?"

A mighty procession of olive-drab doughboys was surging down from the Madeleine, filling the street from curb to curb, dragging two Boche archies and singing, "Hail, hail, the gang's all here!"

"Green-yellow," she admitted. "How say you in your army language? Paris to-day is O.D."

"*Madame*," I replied solemnly, "Paris to-day is an American city. Therefore, with your permission, I shall carry your daughters away to tea in good American fashion."

The reasonable woman realized that I had scored a point. She smiled and gave in at once.

In the tea room I learned that the 'cellist was a poet and a student at the Sorbonne, while the singer was a Red Cross nurse in a French hospital. She told me that she was nursing Moroccan troops, and related with appreciation how one of her dusky patients, fresh from Africa, had wished to buy her for a wife, and had made an offer of fifteen head of cattle for her. He said he would have made it thirty cattle only she was so old. He could not conceive how she could have reached the ripe age of twenty-three without being married. In his country a succulent woman like her, he declared with conviction, is always bought before she is fifteen.

The girls told me that there were three more sisters in the family, all of whom were doing war work of one kind or another. We promenaded a little more in a Paris that had gone quite mad with joy and the spirit of brotherhood, and then strolled over in the late afternoon to see the preparations in Notre Dame for the impending "Te Deum" of victory.

The cathedral was officially closed. But a little diplomacy and the glint of silver, joined with the then prevailing tendency to treat all Americans as saviors of France, won us admission. This success made a deep impression on the girls. And as we wandered about the gorgeously decorated nave, which we had quite to ourselves, they remarked that they had never before been so well treated in Paris. The sight of the American uniform seemed to smooth away every difficulty. Why, it had even procured actual sugar and cakes to go with the tea — an unheard-of thing in those Hooverizing times. It was good to know that all the fun was not on my side.

The next day, having providentially "missed" my train to Nice, I called at the beautiful palace of my so democratic aristocrats. The 'cellist and her sister were not there, but the mother and a new selection of daughters were. The 'cello stood in the corner, and I whisked it forth at once to play sonatas by Handel and Mendelssohn with the head of the family. "Sister Superior," as I came afterwards to call her, discovered a youthful *bravura*, impetuosity, courage, and resourcefulness at the piano, and a feeling for the subtleties of fiddler's magic that filled me with enthusiasm.

The Boches had builded better than they knew. They had not only demonstrated how delightful peace can be after a world war; they had not only given me a new musical adventure. They had also given me something I just then badly needed — a home. For from that day, the whole establishment adopted me as its American brother, declaring that all right-minded French families were adding to their numbers in this fashion, and why should not they acquire one who liked the things they did?

In order to have this adventure just like a story-book in every particular, it lacked only the conventional ending of fiction. I ought to have fallen in love with one of those adorable girls and wooed and won her if possible, and lived happily ever after. They were all the heart could desire. And it certainly would have happened thus if it had not been that my heart was otherwise occupied. I had not lived exactly a saddened existence since that unfortunate episode with Priscilla and the "Méditation" from "Thaïs." I had knocked freely about the world and had had an uproariously good, picaresque time of it as a musical vagabond. The only thing was, I never could get Priscilla out of my imagination enough to want any other girl.

CHAPTER XIII

INTER-ALLIED FIDDLESTICKS

"WHERE is the best 'cello in town?"

It was the old question that had so frequently brought me rich returns in the way of musical adventure. I was asking it on my first morning in Nice.

The leading music dealer scratched his head and pondered profoundly. Then he furnished me with the name and address of the leading 'cellist. And in response to further inquiries, he assured me that he would keep on the alert for talented amateur fiddlers who cherished a passion for string quartets.

I climbed to the apartment of the leading 'cellist, and found him a most agreeable gentleman. After we had conferred for an hour on the subtleties of our craft, and driven home our points by suddenly snatching 'cellos out of corners and fiddling in an illustrative manner, and had exchanged the names of the best 'cello pieces which one of us knew and the other did not, and had settled with finality all the vastest musical problems of the age to our mutual satisfaction, and I had offered to pay him rent for an instrument up to the wealth limit of a first lieutenant, and he had passionately repudiated all suggestions of filthy lucre insinuating itself between kindred and inter-allied spirits, and had unreservedly placed his bow, his mute, his library, and any 'cello within his gates at my disposal at any hour of the day or night — we decided that sometimes things turn out for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and adjourned to quaff vermouth-seltz to the inter-allied musical cause at the café around the corner.

The next morning I received two notes from total strangers. Both had heard of me from the music dealer and both were keen for fiddling orgies.

One note was from an Italian army captain on leave. He had once played the viola. Now that the Germans had given up, he would like to celebrate by playing it again. For he alleged that he knew no more satisfactory method of expressing one's inmost feelings of jubilation than to sit in at a congenial string quartet party.

The other note was from a gentleman who expressed himself with such infectious enthusiasm at the idea of a vagrant doughboy 'cellist dropping into Nice, that I clapped on my cap and started forthwith to hunt him up.

He proved to be a Polish painter and architect who had served in the French army, and had been wounded, disabled, and discharged. Luckily his arms and hands were still in fiddling trim. He possessed a good violin, considerable technic, and a music-room innocent of those rugs and hangings abhorred by all true fiddlers, which drink the heart out of music as thirstily as a sponge drinks water or an infantryman *vin rouge*.

He cherished, for the recreation of amateur fiddling, an enthusiasm so titanic that, if translated into kilowatts (or whatever it is that the electric light corporation over-charges you for on the first of the month), it could quite easily have run all the public utilities of Nice, Monaco, and Monte Carlo.

He hailed with explosive rapture the idea of forming a string quartet. He knew, and vouched for, the Italian captain's fiddling powers. All we now needed was another violinist. He told me that, since his recent arrival, he had already had a little sport in playing trios.

He had found a pianist with nimble fingers, above the volume of whose playing a rugged fiddler might make himself heard. Also, a 'cellist who possessed an incomparable Stradivarius instrument which he called "Josephine," and loved more than life itself.

This gentleman, however, was not now as youthful as he once had been, and his somewhat delicate health did not permit him to indulge in those unbridled fiddling orgies, with the sky the limit, which were so dear to his own fiery Polish soul.

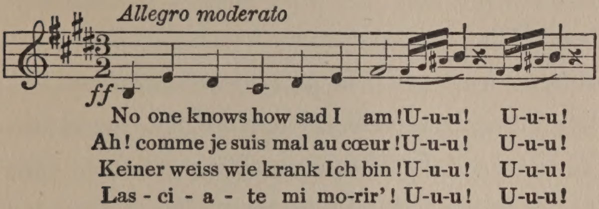
One trio afternoon a week satisfied all the aspirations of the owner of Josephine. This was the afternoon. Would I not attend?

Would I *not!*

That afternoon I found my Pole a very satisfactory amateur with a self-restraint in the softest passages that must have done violence to his impetuous and inflammable nature. He justified his boast, however, of making himself heard above the piano at all times.

Josephine was a perfectly magnificent little Strad. As I listened to her owner, methodically educing from her balmy bosom one note after another of the Tschaikowsky trio, I tried hard to be a good sportsman, and stop longing to caress her satiny neck and lissom strings myself.

I fear her master must have felt my ill-concealed yearning, however, for he suddenly laid down his bow when it came to that one of the variations which ought to be entitled "The Channel Crossing," because it sounds like a small steamer in a very choppy sea, with the passengers all lined up at the rail and singing, each in his own tongue:


Allegro moderato
ff
No one knows how sad I am! U-u-u! U-u-u!
Ah! comme je suis mal au cœur! U-u-u! U-u-u!
Keiner weiss wie krank Ich bin! U-u-u! U-u-u!
Las - ci - a - te mi mo-rir'! U-u-u! U-u-u!

"*Monsieur,*" said the old gentleman to me with a courtly bow, "this music is very strenuous. It has slightly fatigued me. Would you mind to do the kindness of finishing these variations in my stead?"

"What, *monsieur*, not on Josephine?"

"Most certainly, *monsieur*. I charm myself to entrust her to your hands."

Josephine was marvelous. She sang like one of the larger but more feminine morning stars. She ministered tenderly to the melancholy passengers, footed it featly on dainty silken pumps through the mazurka, and lumbered with elegance down the length of the portentous fugue. Right gallantly did she bear herself all through the brilliant charge of the heavy brigade which culminates in the victory of the inter-allies, and she participated in the ultimate funeral procession with becoming decorum — with even, in places, a thrilling solemnity, despite her almost unbridled exuberance. This solemnity I afterwards imagined to contain a touch of prophetic prevision of her own shocking doom.

When at length our pianist had stifled the last muffled drum, I knew that I had scarcely ever in my life played a better fiddle than little Josephine.

I told her owner so.

"*Monsieur*," said he courteously, "consider her as your own whenever you wish to make music while sojourning in Nice. As for me, I utilize her very little. She lies at your disposition." I could see that this charming gentleman had been all broken up by the emotions of the music, for his kind hand shook as it held mine.

I thanked him right heartily and went into the hall to take leave of my hostess, while he put Josephine into her blouse.

Crash!

A sickening report came from the room I had just quitted. It was the same fearful, nerve-shattering sound that I had already heard with dismay and heart-sickness three times before in my life, and could never forget. That sound was more dismaying than the whizz-bang or the mine or the dull crack of the gas-shell.

With grievous forebodings I rushed back to the music-room. My worst apprehensions were realized. There lay Josephine, the noblest Cremonan of them all, shivered to fragments on the rugless floor. Thus cracked a noble heart! Her master, having been rendered absent-minded by fiddler's magic, had grasped her by her slender tail-piece as a preliminary of her toilet. The ancient double-bass gut that secured the strings had pulled out — and now the world lay in ruins about him. Down the pallid cheeks of the poor gentleman gushed tears of anguish and despair, and plentifully bedewed the mortal remains of Josephine.

I had some ado to keep from joining him in this last, sad rite. For all true fiddlers cherish sentiments of almost human admiration and affection for a great fiddle. And, after a fiddler has once played on it and felt it sing and laugh and turn wistful and tender and arch, and thrill with joy or passion or triumph even once under his fingers, these sentiments crystallize into something rather akin to the feeling of a man for a beautiful woman to whom he has made love and who has responded in kind. Of course, the whole thing becomes more intensified if you have not only made love to a fiddle, but taken it to your bosom to have and to hold till death do you part.

As for my own 'cello, it is so much a portion of myself that if any passer-by happens to lurch against it, I feel an actual pang of physical pain, and my fingers involuntarily ball themselves into a fist, and the fist automatically shoots forth in the direction of the assailant before my conscious will has time to pull itself together and limber itself up and take any measures whatever on its own account.

Alas, poor Josephine! I felt as a man in the midst of a gloriously absorbing flirtation would feel if a taxicab suddenly ran over the lady. But I was recalled from the contemplation of my own distress by the parting words of Josephine's owner:

"*C'est fini!* From this hour I shall never again set bow to 'cello!"

Affected as I was, however, I was not Josephine's husband. So I personally could not feel anything like this degree of renunciation. Having such a fragrant cup dashed from my lips only made me all the thirstier for a satisfying draught of fiddler's magic. I withdrew quietly from the house of mourning, after agreeing with my Polish host that the first fellow who ran across the trail of the fourth fiddler necessary to complete our proposed quartet should notify the other "toot sweet."

Almost at once I found what looked as though it might indicate a trail of this kind. It was a street on the way back to the hotel, named the Rue Verdi. This debouched into the Rue Rossini.

"If anywhere," thought I, "one might find a fiddler in such a musical neighborhood as this."

And when the Rue Rossini led, in turn, to the Place Mozart, and I saw that the Place Mozart was wholly given over to my second favorite sport, lawn tennis — a pastime which I have always found to be the ideal complement to my first favorite sport, fiddling — I was sure of being on the right track. The omens were set fair, and I, being a creature of "hunches," decided to ask every one who crossed my path if he knew any fiddler.

Entering instantly, I joined the club, rented a racquet, sneakers, and flannels, and for the first time in what seemed a geologic period, knew the comfort of disporting myself in something else than puttees, tight breeches, and a high stiff collar. In the locker-room I met a number of French, English, and American officers and asked them my foreordained question. But they all knew nothing about the musical side of Nice, and cared less. So I got into an inter-allied tennis quartet, and soon became so engrossed in the discovery that it does not always affect your tennis technic very seriously to be shot, that I forgot about my quest until a tall American came up and introduced himself after the third set.

"Won't you," he asked, "play doubles with me in the tournament next week?"

I had noticed him on the adjacent court, and had admired his long, accurate ground-strokes and the impregnable barrier his height and his deft wrist presented at the net. But I suddenly recalled my quest.

"Charmed," I said, "if you will tell me where to find a good fiddler."

The answer came prompt as a ball from his racquet.

"Nothing easier; that is to say, if you don't mind a girl."

I did, rather. I had found by long experience that if you include a girl in the fiddling fraternity, she generally gets exhausted about a quartet and a half before the rest are ready to stop. And you have to be more formal than is quite comfortable in the realms of fiddler's luck. And she has more moods and tenses than the rest, and usually harbors a prejudice against such real man's music as the quartets of D'Indy and the last Beethovens and the Brahms sextets.

Moreover, one or two of the three men usually side-track the main issue, which is quartet playing, by falling in love with that miserable girl. Thereupon she grows absent-minded and makes a wrong entry in the fugue and puts her fiddle petulantly down upon the table and bursts into a flood of tears which she afterwards attributes to nervous fatigue induced by playing too long and by the severity of the first violinist, when she is really blubbering because the first violinist has kept his head and refused to succumb to her charms along with the violaist and the second. Oh, no! quartets are much more fun if you can only keep them clear of petticoats.

I looked unenthusiastic and told my future tennis partner my philosophy of sex and fiddlesticks.

"But she's really great," he said. "There's no nonsense about her and she's strong as a horse. She's a genuine pupil of Joachim and has a wonderful Guarnerius violin, and reads music at sight the way a broker reads the list of Outside Securities, or a young author reads his first letter of acceptance from a magazine."

"Sounds promising," I admitted. "Lead me to her!"

"I have n't time to-day," he answered, "but I'll scribble you a card."

I took it and hastened to a lofty studio on the other side of town. The tennis player had not deceived me. The fiddler actually was a pupil of Joachim and possessed a real Guarnerius fiddle. There was no nonsense about her, and she read music the way a Rolls-Royce runs downhill.

She was the most international fiddler I had ever met, being partly French, partly English, and partly Spanish, with that slight dash of the Hebraic which Du Maurier recommended in "Trilby" as a desirable ingredient of genius, and a larger dash of Danish, and an Italian name. She seemed to talk every language under the heavens, including the quaintest of English. "Shoulder-blades" she would call "blade-bones"; homesickness she referred to as "country-ache"; and she concluded a feminist eulogy on her own sex with a triumphant reference to "the hand that wags the cradle." Her costume, however, was the uniform of the Y.M.C.A. She told me she was "an entertainer"; and she certainly was.

As soon as she tucked her fiddle under her chin I knew that I had found an ideal first violinist, and at once I mentally degraded my nice Pole to the rôle of second fiddle. He would not mind, once he heard her play. When I unfolded the plan for orgies of chamber music she welcomed it with rapture, and promised to be on hand the following afternoon.

That congress of inter-allied fiddlesticks worked as smoothly as the military forces of France, Great Britain, America, Portugal, and Italy coöperating on the western front during the Meuse–Argonne offensive. The four fiddlesticks scraped along together almost perfectly. The amalgamation of Western Europe represented by the first violin was balanced by the impetuosity and brilliance of our second fiddling Pole from the East, and mellowed by the sensuous southern warmth of Italy as radiated by the genial viola. And the whole outfit was secured to earth by brass tacks through the efficiency-managing efforts of the Yankee bull-fiddler.

Before the first piece was over we were fused to the point where we recognized that there is neither east nor west, border nor breed nor birth, when four strong fiddlers sit face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth.

CHAPTER XIV

LOVE DUET WITH OBLIGATO

THE first violinist's way home and mine lay along the Boulevard Victor Hugo. As we walked, this stalwart young woman looked me over with an appraising eye and remarked:

"You may be a convalescent, but you look not yet quite fiddled out already."

"No more I am."

"Well, what say you to some trios this evening?"

My natural, or rather my long-developed, caution came to the fore.

"Who is the pianist?"

"A young *Américaine*, my side chum in the work of entertainment."

"Does she pound?"

"Heaven beware! Her little white hands can caress the keys more gently than I could wag a sleeping infant."

I looked dubious and said, I fear with a note of impatience, "Yes, yes. I've heard that sort of thing said about pianists hundreds of times. And they generally turn out to 'wag' the piano about as gently as a West Indian hurricane 'wags' a catboat."

"Just you come to-night and see," she replied soothingly.

I burst out: "You think my caution is absurd, I know. But my whole life has been wrecked by that sort of piano-playing, from the time the only girl in the world pounded me out of her life, to the time, only a few weeks ago, when I nearly committed assault and battery on a pupil of César Franck."

My companion's eyes snapped with determination.

"I make then with you a compact. Come to-night and do a Schumann trio. If my little chum plays the *pianos forte*, you shall smash my golden fiddle over her golden head!"

"All right," I laughed. "Just watch me hold you to that."

That evening I arrived early, and the inter-allied fiddler and I had tuned up and exchanged much fiddle gossip before the bell rang.

"My side chum!" she exclaimed, and went to the door.

I had one of my "hunches." A crisis of some sort was approaching. Probably it would turn out to be the same old story. The side chum would pound. I would be rude to her. That would incense the fiddler, of course, and then what would become of the inter-allied fiddlesticks? I really must take myself in hand!

The door opened and in came the side chum, a small figure with golden curls bursting from under one of those deplorable Y.M.C.A. hats which, however, this time did not look deplorable at all. She had a peculiarly buoyant, floating sort of walk, and I noticed that the fingers of one hand were arched slightly outward. With a sudden electric shock of interest I peered under the hat-brim and found two great, unforgettable blue eyes.

Ye gods! It was Priscilla!

"Priscilla!" I cried, and bore down upon her.

She stood petrified, and went as white as marble.

So she had not forgotten, either.

"You!" she gasped.

She caught sight of the gold chevron on my right sleeve, made a half-conscious motion toward it, and then checked herself.

"And you've been wounded! Tell me, quick, are you all right?"

She was just the same Priscilla, womanly, impetuous, sympathetic. She was picking things up exactly where they had been before that fatal quarrel, years ago. For the matter of that, so was I.

For answer, I seized her in my arms, or rather in one, for the 'cello dangled behind her back, and waltzed her swiftly twice about the studio. It was not the sort of thing I was ordinarily given to, but the exuberance of the moment had to be let off in some way. And Priscilla did not seem to mind.

Then we stopped and talked hard. And we had so much to ask each other that, five minutes later, I realized that I still held the 'cello at arm's length in one hand and her soft fingers in the other.

There had not been any years between. It was just some queer freak of fiddler's magic, perhaps, that we were in a strange country, facing each other in these strange garments. Here was Priscilla, with her blue eyes looking the same message into mine, with her fingers arched in the same old adorable way, as if they were reaching for an invisible piano — or my hand. And here was I, holding fast to her with one hand and the 'cello with the other, as it had always been. I drew a long breath of happiness.

"Well, Priscilla, dear, here we are on our world-tour, after all!" I said.

At this point the inter-ally, who, completely forgotten, had been fingering her fiddle-strings impatiently, broke in:

"Is it that you are lost friends?"

We came with an effort to a realization of time and space and the situation, and began explaining together how very far from lost friends we were at that moment.

Her feminist soul evidently considered that enough time had been taken up by the reunion, for at once she said, practically:

"*Alors*, friends or no friends, what of playing that trio?"

At least, it seemed to me that she said it at once. She explained later, in a rather aggrieved tone, that she had given us "an excellent half-hour."

"That trio"! The words turned me cold. Bygones had been up to this moment — bygones. But what would happen if we played together again? I knew my Priscilla's way with the piano. And, alas! I knew myself. Would it not be a reckless courting of renewed disaster?

I began to invent plausible pretexts for postponing the trio until a later occasion. But the first fiddler glared at me as if outraged.

Priscilla pulled herself together, backed up her friend, and seated herself on the piano stool.

With gloomy forebodings I nerved myself to a stern policy of repression, and we plunged into the first movement of Schumann's first trio, the one where the piano has that muddy, difficult, badly written part, full of soft passages with lots of awkward notes in them — where it is next to impossible to keep the piano from sounding like a giant gargling his throat with boiling pitch.

I waited agonizedly for the uproar to start. But it did not start. Pained expectation turned to surprise. Surprise became relieved admiration. Priscilla's white little fingers were flitting over those viscous, unwieldy, Teutonic chords as lightly as a butterfly might "wag" the gossamer cradle of her slumbering infant, if butterflies owned cradles.

The horn spectacles of the first fiddler gleamed at me in sardonic triumph; but I was too relieved and glad and proud of Priscilla to be sheepish. I was dazzled by the vision which that performance opened up. The Priscilla whose image I had long carried about in my heart, and in the back of my watch, had been wonderfully alluring, even though she banged the piano most atrociously. But the new Priscilla who did not bang, but handled the keys like a little master, was too perfect. It needed only this to reduce me to a state of almost imbecile adoration.

From that point on, I fear that our trio became a sort of duet for piano and 'cello with violin obligato. I wormed my chair around to a position where I could catch Priscilla's eye from time to time. Blessed be chamber music! It heightens one's faculties to that telepathic point where you can read the mind of your musical partner almost as well as you can read the printed notes on the rack before you. We two found that we were making up our years of lost intimacy in glances only two or three notes long.

And when at length the music was over, and I had Priscilla to myself out under the hypnotic Riviera moon, we went the longest way around, just as we used in the days when our ostensible goal was an ice-cream soda, and wandered slowly along the beach below the *Promenade Anglais.*

She did not deny my assertion that this sort of duet was even more satisfactory than the kind with the violin obligato. And when my hand crept along the arm I was holding and found her dear fingers in the accustomed way, and she did not withdraw them, but gave mine an answering pressure, I ascended into heaven.

Having reached there, it occurred to me that now was the time to take that desirable locality by storm.

"Priscilla dear, won't you . . ."

The fatal question was trembling on my lips when I was seized with sudden misgivings. This might seem too awfully abrupt, and frighten her.

I ended, lamely:

"Won't you come out to dinner with me to-morrow night?"

She said she would.

"And — Priscilla — you don't bear malice?

We can go on where we left off before that miserable quarrel?"

"Why, I don't want to quarrel!" said Priscilla with wide-eyed and non-committal innocence.

But she had promised to go to dinner with me. That was an important point gained.

CHAPTER XV

MY BOW SAVES EGYPT

A FEW minutes later I was toiling up many pairs of stairs, carrying the borrowed 'cello back to its home, when I was accosted by a stranger. He was a short person in a semi-military, semi-postman's blouse, and a semi-postman's, semi-ecclesiastical cap. He fixed me earnestly with deep-set eyes. They were the eyes of an enthusiast, burning unquenchably behind small, steel-bowed spectacles.

"Sir," he cried, "I demand pardon, but do you play that?"

He pointed to what I held under my arm.

"*Mais oui, monsieur,*" I returned in my very choicest French.

"Do you play it *well?*"

The little eyes flamed even more eagerly. It came to me that my cross-examiner was one of those engaging and radio-active souls whom one cannot choose but like from the first. Not wishing to pad out the leanness of fact with the pneumatic calves of fiction, I explained that though my recent experience of the trenches had not conduced to the formation and maintenance of a technic comparable to that of Pablo Casals, yet —

> Much had I 'celloed in the realms of gold,
> And many good quartets and trios seen;
> On many fiddling orgies had I been —

"Hold, enough!" cried the ecclesiastical stranger, stretching out two fingers toward me as if in benediction. Decision dawned on the little face, and the pointed beard bristled determinedly.

"My mind is made. Let me entreat you to come and save me from destruction!"

"Poor fellow!" thought I. "He must be mad. Much enthusiasm has addled his brain. Or perhaps it's on account of the war." I began to realize that this was a dark and lonely stair and that it might be as well to humor the stranger. So I said sympathetically: "Of course I'll save you from destruction — that is, if I'm up to it. You must tell me how the thing can be managed."

"Know, then," returned the little man, drawing himself up to his entire five feet four, "that I am the Abbé Quillper. On the morrow I produce and conduct, for the first time on the Azure Coast, the opera of 'Joseph in Egypt' by the immortal Méhul. Alas! at this the eleventh hour, my violoncello lies stricken with the Spanish influenza."

"Is the flu, then, spreading to the instrumental world?" I inquired soothingly. "I knew the 'cello was almost human, but really —"

"It is the instrumentalist," said the Abbê hastily, "who lies stricken. Behold, I have ground to a powder the soles of my boots in running about Nice to find another 'cellist. Vain quest! All are either struggling in the throes of overwork, or lie in the clutches of the epidemic. I know not in which direction to turn. *Voilà!*"

He showed me the southern exposure of his off foot. The Abbé had spoken the truth. He was on his uppers! His madness, then, was not due to the war, but to that more up-to-date cause, the labor situation. Or perhaps the little man was not mad at all; only desperate.

I leaned against the balustrade and summarized the situation. Joseph was a musical character whom I had hitherto encountered neither in, nor out of, Egypt. This astonishing stranger proposed that, as sole 'cellist of heaven alone knew what orchestra, chorus, and band of protagonists, I should read "Joseph" at sight, without rehearsing, and at the *première* performance. Truly a dubious proposal!

On the other hand, what untold possibilities it opened up in the line of vagabond musical adventure. Were the stranger mad or sane, here was a sporting proposition ideally calculated to inflame the imagination of the true fiddler errant. Besides, my good fortune in finding Priscilla and making up with her had put me in such a wild state of high spirits and universal benevolence that I would have entertained a request to help out Old Nick himself if I had found him in a bad way.

"Abbé," cried I to the surprising Quillper, "I'm your man!"

Early the following afternoon 'cello and I drove up to the appointed number. At the very outset I was forced to confess that the place looked more like a tenement than an opera house, and my fears for the sanity of Quillper were revived. Up many dingy flights I toiled, seeking for Joseph and fearing a sell. At length on a door I saw the Abbé's card.

A lady one hundred years of age answered my knock. She was bowed beneath the weight of at least fifty of them. I thought that she seemed a fit companion for the pyramids, and inquired if this were Egypt.

"One little moment, *monsieur*, and I will conduct you thither."

She donned a bonnet that would have done credit to the Sphinx, and tottered forth in the lead. A curious pair we must have looked, promenading down that *chic* boulevard, the Sam-Browne-belted six feet one of American officer clutching the exceedingly French blouse of an Italian 'cello, piloted by the four feet nothing of the Sphinx, who was bent double the better to

curiously inspect her lasting home.

An apparently vast throng was struggling for admittance to a small building.

"Behold the opera house," announced the Sphinx, and vanished.

I formed myself into what a football player would have called "interference," and preceded the 'cello into the interior. Four hundred of the natives of Nice were jamming a parochial theater. The Abbé Quillper extricated himself and me from the mob, greeted me with mingled affection and relief, and installed me in the sharp angle made by the port railing of the orchestra.

We musicians were jammed together with such a strict economy of space that my upbow speared a second violinist painfully in the lumbar region, while my down-bow played the mischief with the other 'cellist, a charming lad of seventeen. After the overture began, however, it became clear that if I could manage to play my part with one continuous down-bow it would be better for the musical quality of the opera. The more I interfered with the activities of my bull-fiddling colleague, the more would I contribute to the general well-being of "Joseph in Egypt." For the lad could be counted upon with certainty to do only one thing — and that was to play the wrong note in the right place. As for playing the right note in any place, wrong or right, that ideal would be as unattainable for him as it would be for the Abbé Quillper to look old and apathetic, or for the Sphinx to appear young and sprightly.

I now saw that the Abbé had spoken with a broadly, though not literally, prophetic vision in declaring that I would be the only 'cellist in the orchestra. He might safely have gone further. Mine was the only bass voice in that shrilly treble throng of instruments — always excepting my colleague. Throughout that memorable afternoon I spent my force in inducing the latter, by veiled innuendo, entreaty, cajolery, and at last by threats of personal violence, to play only the rests. At length, to the vast improvement of the general effect, I succeeded. But the good lad, far from resenting my efforts, turned pages for me, heaped coals of fire upon my head and then quenched them with bottles of beer which he brought me during the *entr'actes.*

Though candor compels me to refer to it as one speaks of the sick, the performance did almost as well as was to be expected under the circumstances. Only three times that afternoon, despite the Bolshevist activities of my side partner, did we come to absolute grief and cease and determine and gird ourselves anew for the fray and begin back again at the letter Q.

There was a fourth time, though, when it would have been somewhat better had we ceased, or, at least, determined. This was when the Children of Israel had to do a grand triumphal parade around a stage at least fifteen by twenty feet in expanse. The cornet started off all by himself with a truly brilliant fanfare. Taking their cue almost at once from the cornet, the Children of Israel, led by the Boy Benjamin, began, with the greatest confidence and resolution, to sing something in French, the purport of which I could not catch, probably because I was counting my rests.

Then we of the orchestra came in. But as soon as we took in the nature of the sounds we were emitting, we exchanged glances of dazed bewilderment, not unmingled with consternation. *We were playing in a different key!* Simeon, old villain that he was, winced painfully. The beard of the Patriarch Jacob palpitated with a profound emotion. The Boy Benjamin grew paler by several degrees, but he did not falter. He glared down at us with an expression like that of the *poilu* in the poster who is saying, "They shall not pass!"

Made sadder and wiser by previous painful experiences with amateur orchestras, I saw in a flash what had happened, and swore under my breath that no cornetist ought to be allowed at large without a keeper. This one, with the absent-mindedness of true genius, had inserted in his instrument the short B flat shank instead of the long A shank which had been prescribed for him by the immortal Méhul when inspiration from on high had guided his quill through the gross darkness of Egypt.

Anarchy now reigned supreme. I endeavored to become the man of the hour and jump into the breach. The plan I formed was to reconcile conflicting interests by transposing my part to the exalted key of the cornet and of Israel, and then, by a gradual subsidence, comparable to that of the primordial ocean when it sank, revealing the continents, to lead the vocalists down to the more mundane levels of the orchestra. At least, I hoped to find some grounds for compromise between the belligerents. That hope proved vain. And to this day I am sure that our audience is convinced that Méhul, when he really tries, can be fully as modern a composer as any Bloch or Schoenberg or Stravinksy of them all.

As became a stage under the direction of an *abbé,* the buskined boards remained entirely free from all authentic petticoats. When I found my way behind the scenes during the first *entr'acte,* I sought in vain for the gay Mrs. Potiphar, nor could I discover dancing girls nor Nile maidens nor a daughter of any of the Pharaohs. It was all strictly stag. But I distributed *cigarettes américaines* with impartial hand to the children of light and of darkness, and noted that even the virtuous Joseph did not repulse the offer of an Egyptian Deity.

All the time I marveled more and more and was astonied in spirit at the versatility of that myriad-minded man, the Abbé Quillper. During the first act I had noticed that this *maestro,* whenever the music ceased for so much as ten measures in slow time, or twenty in quick, had always instantly cast down his baton and doubled for the stage door with grim determination, elbowing aside, with a technic evidently begotten of long practice, the throng that blocked the side passage, a few of whom reposed habitually on the back of my neck. I now saw why this economy of time. The man was leading, not a double, but a quintuple life. If he had been a seafaring person, he might well have claimed, in the words of Gilbert:

> "Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
> And the mate of the Nancy brig,
> And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
> And the crew of the captain's gig."

I now perceived the nature of the activities he must have been engaged in during these brief excursions. When I first arrived in the wings he was busily enveloping the chorus in flowing draperies of orange, scarlet, and royal purple. His *poilu*-postman's coat of many colors had been cast aside and he was now "transpiring" so freely that his earnest little beard was quite moist. Then, moving so swiftly that the sight scarce could follow him in his flight, he made one convulsive leap, dragged a tall ladder from a recess, seized a hammer, armed himself to the teeth with tacks, and began tacking up a back-drop consisting of the Sahara desert, the pyramids, an obelisk or two, and a sphinx closely resembling the good lady who had conducted me thither.

From that eminence, breathing out threatenings and tacks, he successfully composed a difference that had arisen between Gad and the progenitor of the half tribe of Manasseh, *in re* the equitable division of a joint bottle of beer. (Bearing in mind a painful but quickly smothered commotion which occurred in the course of the ensuing act in the ranks of the barefooted Children of Israel, I sometimes wonder now, recollecting these emotions in tranquillity, whether, before the curtain rose, all those tacks had been retrieved from the well-trod stage.)

With his own hands the good Abbé clutched, carried, and set in position the bath-chair in the depths of which the Patriarch Jacob (aged seventeen) was to recline at the dramatic moment when his son Joseph (aged nineteen) would break to him the news of their mutual relation. No sooner was this a *fait accompli* than, purple and streaming, the great Quillper rushed forth with a play of elbows into the presence of the impatient groundlings, buttoning his *poilu*-postman's raiment as he ran, seized and brandished the baton in a masterful manner, and the fun was on again.

I had often heard of a book called "The Lightning Conductor." Now at last I knew whom it was about.

I blushed. "And this," thought I with a pang of shame, "is the stupendous genius whom I put down for mad no earlier than yesterday afternoon!" But after all I was comforted by recalling that even scientists like Lombroso and Nordau had also been misled into supposing Parnassus and Bedlam twin peaks.

Despite the rich variety of the entertainment, however, I found, after hours of jammed huddling in the angle of the orchestra railing, that the performance seemed undoubtedly long.

I felt like apostrophizing "Joseph" as William Watson apostrophized Autumn:

> "O be more beautiful or be more brief."

And when the curtain finally fell upon a scene of touching but triumphant composition of all conflicting claims, I reached out my hand for the blouse of my 'cello with a sigh of undeniable relief. For four mortal hours had I been pent in the stifling atmosphere of Egypt. I yearned for a breath of the vital airs of the Azure Coast. Besides, I wanted to take a solitary walk before dinner and bask in the coming delights of the evening with Priscilla, and think out the best way in which to approach the subject of marriage.

"*Un moment*," interposed my colleague. "Do you not wish to await the singing of the *Marseillaise?*"

Why, yes, of course, I'd await it! It would never do for me to bolt just then, however much I wished to. I was the only American present, and in uniform besides.

At that point of the proceedings the Abbé

Quillper showed still another facet of his versatile nature. He mounted a chair, and for some ten minutes harangued the crowd with unfailing fluency. Now, I can understand French fairly well when the speaker does not exceed twenty-five miles per hour. Alas! the Abbé was keeping up a good sixty. All that conveyed itself to my straining intelligence was that a collection was about to be taken up in favor of some extremely worthy object, the precise nature of which I shall never know.

Then the Abbé bounded like a young roe from off his chair, seized the postman's ecclesiastical head-dress, and extended it personally under the nose of every man, woman, and child present. Since the fall of the curtain "*un moment*" nearly half an hour in length had elapsed.

Wielding practiced elbows the Abbé rushed into the wings. From my position on the extreme flank of the orchestra, and endowed as I was by an all-foreseeing providence with a long and adaptable neck, which I now craned, I beheld that myriad-minded man washing the grease paint from off the grubby countenances of the Children of Israel.

Back tore the Abbé, leaving human eddies in his wake. He rapped so loudly for attention that he cracked his baton. He shouted hoarse and impassioned but precise directions to an invisible electrician. Everybody was on the *qui vive.* For at the foot of the programme in heavy type stood:

APOTHÈOSE À LA FRANCE ET CHANT DE
LA MARSEILLAISE

But when the curtain finally rolled up its full majestic height, we beheld the allies grouped, each under his own flag. The ensuing performance of the French national hymn lacked volume, so completely were we all stupefied by the beauty and sublimity of the spectacle.

It was getting on toward the dinner hour. I reached for the blouse, but felt a detaining hand on my arm. "*Encore la Marseillaise!*" whispered my fellow 'cello.

"All right!" I played with a will, faking an even richer bass than the first time, when I, too, had been slightly overcome by what I had seen on the stage. We made an end.

"Now, then," shouted the good Abbé (I give the gist of his utterance), "all together chant yet again the *Marseillaise*, and put your backs into it this time!"

But when we were through putting our backs into it, I did not even make a pass for the blouse. I had lost hope. Nor was my state of mind unjustified. Eleven times, hand running, by actual count, did we perform the national hymn of France!

At length the Abbé, definitively casting down his ruined baton, made for the stage door at top speed. To my surprise and no small embarrassment, however, he did not burst as usual into the wings. Instead, he stopped directly behind me, leaned over the railing of the orchestra, flung his arms about my neck, and acclaimed me distinctly before the interested audience as the savior of Joseph, the Children of Israel, the science of four-part harmony, and the immortal Méhul. And, working up to an impassioned climax, "*Monsieur le Lieutenant Américain*," said he, "will you not deign to bear me company around the corner? There, on the sidewalk before the Café de Monte Carlo, shall I invite you to join together with me in an *aperitif*. Thanks to you, Egypt is saved!"

CHAPTER XVI

UN MOMENT D'AMOUR

WITH many thanks I declined this invitation. Priscilla was expecting me that very minute, and, besides, I was cumbered with the wretched 'cello, the returning of which would make me even later.

The little Abbé seemed much cast down. He insisted that he would like to do something for me to show the boundlessness of his gratitude. That gave me an inspiration.

"Abbé," I said, "do you see this burden?"

I indicated the 'cello.

"Well, it took me a year and a half to learn how to carry a 'cello safely through the streets of a city. But I have come to perceive that you are a man capable of mastering any subject at a glance. You are the most universally versatile genius of my acquaintance. Could you — would you — restore this dog-house to its rightful owner?"

Before the words were well out of my mouth, the Abbé Quillper had torn the dog-house from my clutches with glad cries of satisfaction and assurances of his perfect competency, and had vanished with it.

I hastened to Priscilla's hotel. It was late, and I had now no time to concoct a careful proposal. I would have to rely upon the inspiration of the moment. But I thought again of her angelically friendly attitude the evening before, and how her little hand had snuggled down inside mine. And I took heart. After all, we had been going to be married once upon a time. What was this but a renewal of those old days?

We went to La Belle Jardinière on account of the amazing array of *hors d'œuvres* we were sure to find there. And such service! I had not yet removed my overcoat when the waiter thrust an enormous wine-card insistently under my nose.

"*Un moment*," said I with a superb copy of my late fellow 'cello's accent.

"*Oui, oui, monsieur,*" he cried with anxious deference, "*toute de suite!*"

He whisked away the card and ran to the *maître d'hôtel.* We heard him say: "*M'sieu désire une bouteille de 'Un Moment.'*" And they began exhaustive researches through the list for this novel brand of wine.

Priscilla and I laughed delightedly. And she laughed still more when I recounted to her the multifarious activities of the good Abbé Quillper, and the "*un moment*" I had spent in awaiting the apotheosis of France. We had so much to tell each other, and the food was so interesting, that I had even less time than during the performance of "Joseph" to formulate my plan of attack.

But now I had stopped worrying. The mellow substitute for the bottle of "*Un Moment,*" and the sweet friendliness which Priscilla gave me, combined to render me nearly assured of success, and I talked on victoriously. We were both of us wildly excited and very happy.

The dinner finished with a *petite verre* of apricot brandy which made me feel entirely confident and confiding. I proposed a walk on the beach. Priscilla liked the idea. And as soon as we reached it I felt I must begin at once to pave the way for the great moment.

My heart was pounding away faster than the Abbé's elbows as he had made for the stage door. But it was high with courage. I felt that there could be no misunderstandings with Priscilla now. We knew each other far too well for that.

There was a small semicircle of white sand in front of a screen of rocks and there we settled down together and looked out across the silver ripples toward Africa. Daring greatly, my hand stole about her waist. She leaned a little closer, relaxing against my shoulder with a sigh of content. My dear little Priscilla!

"Priscilla, dear," I whispered, "it's absolutely perfect, is n't it, now?"

"Now? Just what do you mean by 'now'?" she asked with a certain quality of surprise in her voice. She drew away from me a little. But I heeded no danger signal.

"You know what I mean perfectly well," said I airily. "You were adorable before, except for one thing — the way you pounded the piano, you know. But last night, when I heard how deliciously soft you had learned to play, and what a great artist you had become, my heart sort of turned a summersault. From that moment I began to love you more than I ever dreamed was possible. That made things absolutely perfect. . . . Why, Priscilla, what's the matter, dear?"

For, as I ended, Priscilla had suddenly stiffened within my arm. And now she leaped to her feet and stood very straight and proud before me, her eyes full of tears.

"So that's what you have to have before your lordship lets himself love a girl!" she cried — "a piano virtuoso!"

She caught her lower lip in her teeth to steady it.

I scrambled upright.

"That's not so," I protested, "and you know it! It's you I care about. Don't be so unjust, Priscilla. I love you for yourself. Only, your wonderful playing makes you all the more perfect."

She tried to snap her fingers.

"I would n't give *that* for the devotion of a man who could let a thing like music make the least difference in his feelings. If you truly loved me, you'd love me just the same whether I played like Moiseiwitch or took two rungs out of a chair and beat the piano like a carpet!"

I was paralyzed, speechless. As I stood there, stupidly casting about in my mind for some convincing argument, Priscilla turned and made matters still worse by walking rapidly away. I had to exert myself to overtake her.

"My dear — "

"I'm not your dear! You'd better be careful! I might strike a wrong note some time. Then you'd be sorry you'd ever associated with — with me."

She was crying; but she was unmistakably angry, too. There was no doubt in my mind that I had hurt her feelings and her pride intensely. Yet how innocently I had spoken!

"Priscilla," I pleaded, "I love you so tremendously. I thought we had come so close together and understood one another so well. I give you my word of honor I was sure you'd understand what I really meant. I never dreamed you'd get jealous of my love for your art."

"You and your love of art!" she cried. "You love art so — I don't see what you want to bother with girls for! Buy yourself an automatic piano-player and live with it. You can regulate it to please yourself. You don't need me!"

We had reached her gate and she marched in and shut me out.

I grew desperate.

"Oh, my dear," I cried. "Don't go this way! Tell me when I can see you again."

"I'm very busy these days," she said bitterly. "I'm married to the Y.M.C.A. And you 're married to your old 'cello. This is where our ways part. You've made enough unhappiness in my life already. I don't intend to speak to you or see you again."

It was now my turn to be angry. If she had really loved me, the Y.M.C.A. should not have counted in her life at all — nor yet the fact that I had a reasonable regard for the right kind of playing.

CHAPTER XVII

A MODERN NERO

THAT was what I felt like — a modern Nero, fiddling, with a heart gloomy and unsatisfied, while Paris burned with joy and blazed with glory at the coming of President "Veal-sohn." After the stygian darkness of the era of air-raids, this sudden illumination gave the illusion that the city was on fire. Certainly most human hearts, except mine, were. There is a flavor of death in every parting, especially when lovers part in anger, and my heart felt as though it had caught the infection at that gate in Nice.

I had traveled all the way up to Paris, ostensibly to see my fellow Princetonian come to town, though my real reason was to get as far away from all recollections of Priscilla as possible. I had poured out my Priscillan sorrows to my dear adopted family, and they consoled me in various ways. The youngest sister, the one whom I had originally addressed on the street corner because she played the violin, and whom I had nicknamed "The White Elephant," was of a romantic turn of mind. She kept assuring me tenderly that all would yet be well, and that Priscilla and I would meet again in a mood of mutual forgiveness for everything musical or unmusical that we had ever done to one another. The sister known as "The Fairy" was a sterner soul. She essayed to comfort me by explaining that a girl with a temper like Priscilla's was not good enough for me anyway, and should be forgotten. But the suggestion of the delightful "Pink Elephant," aged fourteen, seemed to have the most sense of all. This was that I should clear my mind of Priscilla, temporarily, while the rejoicing over "Veal-sohn" was at its height, and then await developments. This plan I resolved to carry out as best I could.

Guided by a goodly selection of adopted family, I saw the makers of history ride down the Avenue du Bois between lines of folk mad with enthusiasm. Then the family took me home for a long session with fiddler's magic. And after dinner we all issued forth to join the celebration in the Grands Boulevards. Everybody was agreed that Paris was going madder over "Veal-sohn" than it had gone over the armistice itself. Midnight found us sitting upon the sidewalk tables of that hub of the universe, the Café de la Paix. In the immediate foreground a magnificent *poilu* was dancing gracefully with a beautiful slim girl, very *chic* under a scarlet Moroccan fez. Just beyond them a heavy German mortar was being propelled by as many mixed *poilus* and doughboys as could get their hands on it, while every inch of riding surface held soldiers waving great flags of silk which had evidently been borrowed from some imposing *façade.*

Beyond, up to the very portals of the Opéra seethed a vast throng. We forced our way toward the speakers on the steps. A spokesman would cry, "See — *lonce!*" and the cry would be translated into terms of martial music by a *poilu* bugler. Then the speaker would propose a cheer for "Veal-sohn" or Clemenceau or Foch or some allied crowned head, and we would all cheer ourselves hoarse.

There were a few casually assembled horns and trumpets with the speaker, and every few moments they would break forth into some national hymn, soon to be overwhelmed in a flood of song. Once they burst into "Tipperary," and then everybody danced in a frantic manner, careening and caroming into all and sundry, and sang as they danced. I wish I had a dictaphone record of the exact words sung by each member of that polyglot throng!

Every one seemed to feel that he must do what he could to add vigor to the celebration. There was a wounded second lieutenant of Infantry, U.S.A., who was too lame to dance and too hoarse to sing any more. So, at some risk and pains, he climbed upon the head of one of the marble statues on the *façade* of the Opéra, just behind the band. It was, I think, the statue of old Cherubini, equipped with a lyre and trying to look like Apollo. And there sat the shavetail on Cherubini's ambrosial locks, waving together two large French and American flags back and forth over our heads. He was a splendid-looking young chap with a curly blond head, and he made a picture that appealed greatly to the crowd.

The next day I began a search through the music stores of Paris in order to enrich the musical library of my adopted sister who played the 'cello. But France, it appeared, was practically sold out of good music; and no more could as yet be obtained from beyond the Rhine. So I bethought me of a famous pianist whom I had known in the old days. He possessed all chamber music and would probably loan me anything I wanted.

The way led down past Balzac's house into one of the oldest and quaintest parts of Paris. I was recognized at once and cordially welcomed.

"Just the chap we want!" exclaimed the pianist. "We were longing for a 'cellist. Now you must stay to dinner and then we will have some trios with my friend here." He introduced me to a violinist whom I had often seen playing in the Lamoreaux Orchestra. "But hold on!" he suddenly cried, with one of those lightning changes from gayety to despair which are characteristic of the musical plus the Gallic temperament. "I forgot. You must not stay to dinner after all. We have recently turned vegetarians. You would scorn our food. And besides, it occurs to me that we have no 'cello for you. Without a 'cello trios cannot exist."

"That is easily arranged," I reassured him, with that resourcefulness which is inculcated in army regulations. "I'll just slip out and buy my own dinner and bring it back to eat with you, and incidentally pick up a 'cello on the way."

The brow of the great pianist cleared.

"Ah, you Americans!" he exclaimed. "What homage I render your *élan*, your energy and resource, your — how do you call it — peppair. But wait, then, I myself will accompany you, for I know the shops of the quarter perhaps better than you."

On my way there I had noticed the establishment of a fiddle doctor, in the window of which reclined a voluptuous-looking golden-brown 'cello. Thither we hastened, and found the doctor in the act of putting up his shutters. I seized the golden-brown one, played some flourishes upon her, chattered much bad French to her owner, while showing him my identification tag and the little oilcloth-covered book containing the officially stamped army photograph, where I look like a condemned murderer backed up against a stone wall and peering in a dazed manner down the muzzles of the firing squad.

The doctor could not read a word of any of this literature. But by that time he was smoking one of my cigarettes and clutching one of my five-franc notes. Without a struggle he allowed the voluptuous 'cello to depart under my arm for the evening, merely telling me that her name was Héloise.

We then bought *patés de fois gras* and wine, delicious pears and mandarins, and tried to get a little cheese. Only, my unpractical virtuoso, in his entire innocence of weights and measures, succeeded in securing me a wedge of Gruyère large enough to sustain a platoon of infantry.

It then remained only to supplement my friend's bread supply. By this time, however, all the bread shops were closed. But we espied a light in a room adjoining one, and, dimly through the pane, discerned a long, luscious-looking loaf.

I rapped on the door. No answer. I pounded with more vigor. No response. I applied my foot to that door as resolutely as the pupil of Franck had applied hers to the loud pedal. The door was pushed open an inch.

Bread? No. There was no bread left. And did we not discern how advanced the hour was?

"Oh, but what was that delicious-looking object I saw through the window *là bas?*" I inquired, ostentatiously flirting the cigarette case.

"*Mais oui, monsieur,*" said *Madame*, relenting all at once. "But to misters the Americans we have no choice but to yield all! Bread shall you have — bread, indeed, from off our very own table."

As we entered the outer door, grandfather, grandmother, husband, wounded son, well son, and countless daughters streamed from the rear into the little shop, while *Madame* tore off my bread tickets and attacked the loaf as if she were going for a Boche with a trench knife, and I purveyed cigarettes to all and sundry.

Our communal meal was highly successful. And the trio evening? Alas! it came to nothing after all. I had forgotten to provide Héloise with a bow, and it was now too late to go back for one.

CHAPTER XVIII

I BUNK WITH THE STRAD

TWO months after the armistice found me still in hospital. I might have gone home as a convalescent. But as I had been shot the very first time I went over the top, and had been prevented from performing that maneuver again by the victorious eastward advance of the German forces on the western front while I still cumbered Base Fourteen, I felt that I had not yet been given a fair chance at the war. It was my duty to go to Germany. The more so, because at Camp —— I had helped weed out of the American army many of those loyal scions of the Fatherland who were more at home than the rest of us in the use of the German language. I felt that our unlinguistic Army of Occupation could find use for that knowledge of the Boche, his land and his language, which I had painfully acquired years before in writing a series which had been ordered by a magazine on the beauties and charms of Germany. But a more potent reason was my desire to seek some land that would not remind me of Priscilla. How agreeable when the lion, Duty, lies down with the lamb, Inclination!

So, for six days, I chaperoned a couple of hundred healed heroes back to the 79th Division in the Verdun country, *via* those doughboy Pullmans elegantly labeled

HOMMES 40
CHEVEAUX 8

This watchword, by the way, had become so proverbial among us that the newspaper of our hospital center had placed it in a "box" at the top of its first page, instead of such well-worn mottoes as IN GOD WE TRUST, or WHAT IS HOME WITHOUT A TOP SERGEANT?

On my way back to rejoin the 313th Infantry, however, I was set upon by a high-up officer, a major who had gone through college with two of my nephews. One of the most enlivening things about the A.E.F. was the way one was always running into one's former overlords and past-masters doing K.P. as buck privates; or else discovering in one's proud maple-leaf and buzzard-decked superiors, former infants in arms whom one had favored with sage and condescending advice. This particular playmate of my little nephews immediately caused me to be created something known as "Asst. G 3," which really meant that I was to write the division history.

It soon became evident to me, however, that this occupation was not getting me any nearer my goal; that, in fact, the 79th Division was not slated for the Rhine. So I laid hold of all the wires in sight, and pulled. I wanted to know how much of a difference there was between entering Germany as a magazine writer and entering it as a conqueror. Then, too, I suspected that a musical vagabond might find there an opportunity for some diverting adventures.

The other ends of the wires I pulled were fortunately secured to the right parties. After three weeks I was summoned to the C.O.'s office and was shown a telegram from the head of the A.E.F. ordering me to report forthwith for duty on detached service at Advance General Headquarters, Treves, Germany.

With rejoicing I took my way to Treves. The third day found me settled there and asking the same old question I always ask when I strike a new place and am 'celloless:

"Where is the best 'cello in town?"

My new task was to help regulate the commerce of that portion of Germany occupied by the Yankees. I needed a little music in the evenings as a countercharm.

Neither my colonel brother nor my lieutenant nephew seemed to know, although my brother dispassionately advised me to get hold of *some* bull-fiddle "toot sweet," as a fine pianist was stopping at our hotel, the Porta Nigra for that night only.

So I inquired at the leading music store, and was answered by the proprietress in perfect United States. She explained that she came from St. Louis, had married a German before the war, and when the doughboys had first marched through on their way to Coblenz bridgehead, she had actually seen her own brother in the ranks.

"Where is the best 'cello?" She assured me it was in the possession of Dr. Matteus who would doubtless be glad to show it to me. The doctor proved to be a collector of 'cellos. He showed them to me readily enough. But he cast sidelong glances at my Sam Browne, and I could see that he was consumed with a secret fear lest I requisition the lot. When I reassured him on this point, he was so relieved that he brought out of hiding his chief treasure. Shades of Amphion, Orpheus, and Apollo! It was a twin of poor dear Josephine, that incomparable Strad which, fresh from my worshiping hands, had but a few weeks ago been shivered to fragments on the floor of the Pole's music-room in Nice.

I fell upon her satin neck and played a loud, exultant strain of Tschaikowsky. The doctor's face worked painfully. He explained that he had just served four years on the western front as major, and, as his hands had become so stiff that he could no longer play the 'cello, and as this was the first music he had heard since August, 1914, I must really pardon him if he seemed upset.

An American lieutenant came into the room just then, to bid the doctor farewell. He flourished his travel orders at me in a gleeful manner and explained that he had been billeted in the doctor's house, but was now on his way to a still more attractive place where, in fact, a certain well-developed young lady was brandishing a shower-bath fixture at the stars in upper Manhattan Bay.

I fiddled him an appropriate strain called, "I wanta go home!" on the twin of Josephine, and explained what a wonder she was.

"Look here, Lieutenant," said he, "if you like that fiddle so much, why not come to the house for keeps and bunk with her? Just get the billeting officer to fix you up with my room. I'm digging out by the next train."

No sooner suggested than done. Before dinner that night I was installed in a room fairer than the dreams of avarice, that looked out over a lovely garden to the lovelier, red sandstone, pine-crowned cliffs beyond the Moselle. And Josephine's twin lived in her coffin in the corner by the bed.

That evening I carried her over to the Porta Nigra to make music with the pianist my brother had told me of. He proved to be a shavetail *en route* to the Army of Occupation on the Rhine. When all the officers had been assembled in the hotel parlor and I had tuned up, a difficulty arose. There was no music. The meeting had been arranged too hastily.

But it soon developed that the shavetail's memory was as good as his fingers. We found when we tried that the standard 'cello and piano sonatas had worn grooves in our minds without our knowing it. And, in the excitement of discovering mutual musical comprehension in the A.E.F., it turned out, to our pleased surprise, that we could reproduce large parts of the Grieg, Franck, Strauss, and Beethoven sonatas.

Next morning the shavetail went his way. But he had whetted my appetite. So I set forth on the trail of fiddlers militant.

I unearthed a large, genial corporal who spent his days in the post-office, combing the mails for contraband. At home he was the leading professional fiddler of a fairly large and sophisticated city. He would do well as first violin of an amateur string quartet. A small, meek private in the quartermaster corps was found who operated the viola in a painless manner. But, as usual, my chief difficulty came in securing that fabulous personage, now almost as extinct as the ichthyosaurus, a good second fiddler. The reason for this is that the bad fiddlers are not good enough, and the good ones all want to play first.

Finally I had recourse to the St. Louis music dealer who had put me on the trail of Josephine's twin. She said:

"There is a doctor captain in your hospital who fiddles excellently and is a most intelligent and genial person."

And that was how I came across my chum, Johnnie. An hour after I had called him up I was in my office, poring over a letter from a frenzied Luxembourg manufacturer who had written us in his choicest English. It closed as follows:

"We hope that the American department may accord the same what the German department thought to can allow to a friend of the Allies; otherwise we fail to desesperate of the humanity."

The door burst open and Captain Johnnie, short, plump, and forceful, bore exuberantly down upon me.

"Lieutenant, are you any relation to the chap who writes all that stuff in the magazines?" he demanded in the unprefaced way which I was to learn well.

I showed him the sort of literary work with which I was wrestling at the moment, and explained that though my relations with the chap he referred to had once been of an intimate nature, I now felt as if our intimacy had flourished several lives ago on distant a planet.

Johnnie laughed over the Luxembourger's letter and wanted to know what was all this I had talked into the telephone about getting up an amateur string quartet in the A.E.F. He confessed that his fiddling had been mostly of the solo variety, but he was always ready to try anything new, once. I told him about Josephine's twin, and how she was shrieking aloud for other fiddles to have some fun with. Then, of course, I had to go back and tell him about Josephine, and all the other fiddles and fiddlers I had had the good luck to find in France.

"Son," quoth Johnnie, "that sounds positively immoral. You talk like a regular polycellist, if you don't mind my coining a word. But," he continued flatteringly, "let me tell you one thing. You're wrong about your good fortune. The luck of finding a four-leaf clover or a Strad consists in having perceptions keen enough to find a four-leaf clover or a Strad."

That very evening we tried out the proposed combination of fiddlers in the spacious hall of the billet where I was living with Josephine's twin. The acoustics were perfect. We found the room mysteriously garnished by some unseen hand with goblets and many bottles of Moselle wine.

Johnnie claimed he was having the time of his life. He was so enthusiastic and was keyed up so highly that he sat poised on the extreme outside edge of his seat, and whenever a solo fell to his lot he became inspired to such an extent that he gradually rose up toward the firmament and sat on the atmosphere, while unconsciously stepping upon the musical "exhilarator," and increasing the pace by twenty miles an hour.

His effervescence made a strange contrast to the Olympian calm of the large corporal, to the shrinking and self-deprecatory mien of the little private who always looked as if hiding behind his viola, and the stern, field-marshal manner which Johnnie attributed to me when trying to rally my disorganized forces during one of his solos.

Johnnie used to tell his friends, with glee, of a discussion we had after the music that night in which he claimed (falsely, I am sure) that I said it was as hard for a confirmed player of solos to enter into the kingdom of chamber music as for a rich man to go through the eye of a camel. He claims I followed this statement by telling him that, as an *ensemble* player, he must be a very fine soloist. But I indignantly repel this canard. There were not enough bottles in the doctor's cavernous cellars to make me as unreservedly frank as this to any second violinist whom I had been so fortunate as to capture. I would as soon dare tell the cook what I thought of her.

Sometimes, during these quartet evenings, the owner of Josephine's twin would drop in for a movement or two, and listen hungrily to the music. Once, when a Beethoven quartet suffered utter annihilation at our hands, he chuckled and suggested that a certain war anecdote might perhaps furnish me, as leader, a valuable suggestion.

In the course of an examination for a commission in the German infantry, a candidate was asked what command he would give if his company were suddenly attacked on all sides by overwhelming numbers.

"*Helme ab zum Gebet!*" he answered unhesitatingly: "Helmets off for prayer!" The doctor evidently felt that, instead of annihilating Fort Beethoven, the forces of the stronghold had pulled off a surprise attack on us, to our undoing.

Those quartet sessions constituted the chief recreation I found in Treves. The one other resource was to go to the opera. But I soon discovered that going there netted me more pain and anguish of mind than pleasure. For, though the stock company, the orchestra, and the repertoire would have done credit to a city several times the size of Treves, yet there was always some one on hand to take the joy out of life. This one generally resolved himself into a low-brow American officer of such rank that I could not very well call him down, who would wander in out of the cold with two Red Cross nurses, and they would lift up loud, uncompromising voices and talk straight through the show. And when, about the middle of the second act, I would finally throw discretion to the winds, because my mercury had risen past summer heat, and would expostulate with the officer, one of his fair escorts would be sure to make good her claim to being a red, cross nurse and would look me up and down in a withering manner, with special attention to the solitary state of the silver bar on my shoulder, and shift her gum to the other cheek and then inquire shrilly:

"Aw, how do you get that way?"

Then I would retreat home in disorder, full of shame at my brutality to a lady — and wonder with equal shame what the conquered population in the adjoining seats must think of our tricks and our manners.

Therefore the amateur evenings filled a deeply felt want. There was one particularly memorable moment when, in the middle of a Haydn quartet, we suddenly realized that we were playing the variations on the national hymn of the then defunct Austrian Empire. We stopped in the middle of a phrase and burst out laughing. There were we, four warriors in Yankee uniform, sitting upon the neck of prostrate Germany, and, filled by a pure and impersonal passion for beauty, fiddling the strains which had been to her deceased chief ally, what the "Star-Spangled Banner" was to us.

"Look here," exclaimed Johnnie, "we must counteract this!"

And, tucking his fiddle under his chin, he led off in a spirited performance of that classical air, "Keep Your Head Down, Fritzie Boy!"

In course of time I was transferred to the office of the Sanitary Inspector and, it having been ascertained that I had once written poetry, the powers directed my literary energies to translating a German book with the following lyrical title: "CONCERNING ŒDEMA WITH HYPERTONIC BRACHYCARDIA." As a change and relaxation, I was occasionally allowed to compute the birth and death rates for all the *Kreise* of the American occupied area, and make an intensive study of the ration components.

Johnnie came in one day, glanced over my shoulder at a masterpiece of the translator's art with which Edward Fitzgerald would have hesitated to compete, then laid a compelling hand upon me.

"Old boy," he said, "now at last I understand why you have been looking so worn and world-weary and frazzled out of late. At first I thought you might be suffering from a broken heart or something." Here Johnnie paused and looked me over inquiringly. I kept my counsel. "But now," he went on, "I see what the trouble is. Let me have your full attention. I am about to prescribe for you. Go down this instant to the Executive Officer and get a leave from Saturday noon to early Monday morning. I'll tell you the rest of the treatment later. I'm a neurologist, you know, so you'll be safe in my hands."

Whatever may have been his shortcomings in the department of fiddling, in the department of neurology Johnnie spoke as one having authority. I got my leave and joined him on the train for Coblenz. Arriving, we extorted two cold-storage beds from a billeting lieutenant with the instincts of a pawnbroker and the manners of a lieutenant-general. We dined cheerlessly on the same old army horse — for we were still in the self-denying American area where it was forbidden to buy German food — and then Johnnie prescribed for me a performance of "Rigoletto" at the opera house.

He meant well. Throughout the evening a bronzed American captain behind me kicked time to the music on the rungs of my chair with a powerful hobnailed boot; and this amused Johnnie more than it did me. In fact, he shook all over with enjoyment, thus dulling his senses against the horrors of the first act, because, as he afterwards explained, this captain's brand of musical appreciation was exactly what I had fulminated against in one of his favorite essays. I myself was too embittered to see the joke.

Then, at the beginning of that arch-bore, the second act, Johnnie relapsed into a profound slumber, during which, I regret to say, he snored like an impassioned trombone. I let him snore, hoping in vain that his contribution to the creative labors of Verdi would dull the enjoyment of the rhythmical captain back of me, or at least confuse his too acute sense of rhythm and throw his foot off the beat.

Vain hope! The captain may at times have faltered more or less in his great task of happiness; but his hobnails, like the soul out of John Brown's body, went marching on, on my chair, without disturbing Johnnie. At a particularly ill-advised howl from the stage, however, occurring just before the close of the act, Johnnie awoke with a terrific jolt, as of a flivver, driven by a lady who mistakes the accelerator for the brake, bringing up all standing against the stone wall of the police station.

He stole a stealthy glance at me. I was politely engrossed in the stage. The curtain fell.

"Do you know," he said, with a hint of the sheepish in his tone, "for just a few seconds back there I got the least bit absent-minded."

"Did you?" said I with glee, and felt much comforted. Through no fault of Johnnie's, I began to mend from that moment.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FALL OF FORT BEETHOVEN

THE next day the cure was continued by a pious musical pilgrimage down the Rhine.

"Do you remember," asked Johnnie as we entered the train, "the time our forces met defeat at the hands of Beethoven? Well, we're going to counter-attack now. We're on our way to his stronghold at Bonn."

Bonn was fortunately situated in the British occupied territory, where the invaders were less solicitous than we Americans as to just what the natives were to eat, and in consequence "did themselves" jolly well. In a dainty room of the *Kaiserhaus*, overlooking the Rhine bridge, we had the first really interesting meal since leaving France, and washed it down with good old Saint-Julien.

At half-past two we were standing before our goal, the birthplace and museum of the composer Beethoven, and eyeing with dismay a placard which said:

CLOSED SUNDAYS AT 2

In response to repeated hammerings an old woman opened the door a crack and showed us a forbidding frown. But Johnnie was equal to the occasion. Pulling from his blouse a large slab of sweet chocolate, he inserted it through the aperture, together with his foot, at the same time reeling off a lot of emotional details in his best student German to the effect that we had come a long way expressly for this pleasure and that the treaty could never be properly signed until we, as representatives of the American Expeditionary Force, had thoroughly investigated Beethoven.

The old woman clutched the chocolate hungrily, and then, in a dazed manner, bade us enter, mumbling that this time she would have to make in our case an *Ausnahme,* that elegant word for "exception" which, literally translated, is an "out-take."

In a victorious mood we plucked souvenir leaves of ivy from the hand-made statue of the master in the back yard, and mounted the stairs. Candor obliged us to confess that the birth chamber of this genius was not the most imposing place he could have chosen to be born in. It was about the size of a well-developed bathroom, with a rough-hewn floor and rougher rafters five feet above it.

We cordially shook hands with the miserable little organ on which Beethoven had learned to play as a lad of eleven. And Johnnie cried aloud in anguish at sight of the poor, old deaf musician's clumsy, heavy, ineffective brass ear-trumpets, which looked for all the world like the Klaxon on an early Christian Ford.

"If he could have only put his case in my hands!" moaned Johnnie, apparently in the depths of despair. "It was all foolishness for him to go and get deaf like that!"

Then we came to the gem of the museum, the manuscript cases, where we gloated over the originals of the "Moonlight Sonata," "Fidelio," the "Pastoral Symphony," and that joy of our lives, the string quartet opus 59, number 3. And, to inflame us further and make our mouths water so that our thirst was destined later to neutralize much German beer, we beheld, hanging in a glass case near by, the most famous quartet of fiddles in the world, the priceless Amati, Ruggeri, and Guarneris which Prince Lichnowsky once gave the master, thereby proving himself a true prince.

When Johnnie caught sight of them I had to hold him to keep him from running up the walls in his frenzied enthusiasm.

"Just let me get at those beauties in there, once," he cried, "and sit down with three good fiddlers to this!" His hand rested on the glass above the sere and yellow leaves of opus 59. "And you might fricassee or hash me afterwards, or even turn me over to Hard-Boiled Smith, the primitive military policeman of Paris. I would n't complain. I should have had my day!"

"Johnnie," said I, "do you realize that this room contains about the best things that Germany has managed to save out of the wreckage? Do you realize when these four fiddles were last touched by human hands? It was when the Joachim Quartet played them in this room at the Beethoven festival a generation ago."

"Never you mind!" cried Johnnie. "Times has changed. Love and chocolate will find a way!"

Then, warming to the subject, "Why, strike me pink if we don't bring our corporal and our private up here and play opus 59 on the great Beethoven fiddles this day week!"

Alas! It was not to be. I do not know whether Johnnie was ever temporarily struck pink. He has not confessed. His bronzed complexion, I know, would absorb a considerable bulk of Mary Garden rouge without appreciable improvement. But I do know that that day week I was on my way to "St. Agony," the place where so many members of the A.E.F. went first when they were *en route* to see the large young lady with the shower-bath fixture in the sweet land of liberty.

On the return journey I amused myself with reminiscences of the previous evening, and could not resist urging Johnnie to tell me exactly how it felt to be absent-minded, and then demanding a critical estimate of the second act of "Rigoletto." Driven into a corner, Johnnie confessed that he could not describe that act, though it were his last. But he soon evened the score.

Our compartment in the leisurely train was infested by a quartermaster lieutenant who entered whistling Schubert's "Serenade" and kept on whistling Schubert's "Serenade" for three quarters of an hour without apparently drawing breath. He made an even more continuous non-stop run than a Big Ben alarm clock when thoroughly alarmed. I tried everything I knew to divert him — that is, within the bounds of military courtesy. I opened controversies with Johnnie on the rawest sides of politics and religion. The lieutenant whistled calmly on. I handed him the most engrossing comic papers in our possession. His eyes devoured them, but the jokes only made him perform more piercingly and happily than ever. He is the only person I have ever overheard whistling a laugh, and I never want to hear another.

I "slaughtered him with cruel looks." He inspected me in return as if I were some freak ornithological specimen, but Schubert's "Serenade" flowed on like Tennyson's brook. At the end of the three quarters of an hour the lieutenant stopped and drew a long breath. I drew one, too, of relief.

But my hopes were dashed. He started immediately on another tune. It was now the "Méditation" from "Thaïs," that ill-starred piece which had been the basis of my first youthful quarrel with Priscilla. I reflected with bitter repentance on an essay I had once published. It was entitled "A Defense of Whistling." Perhaps that miserable infestant of the S.O.S. opposite had read my essay and it had encouraged him to form this habit! I could see that Johnnie, fatally well-read where I was concerned, was thinking of that essay too, and enjoying himself hugely. Leaning over, he asked me, in a coarse whisper, what I now thought of the advantages of absent-mindedness.

The train found things going *contrairy* ahead, and crept along at a funereal pace in keeping with the cheerfulness of my own mood. That lieutenant had lungs like those of a free air machine. I felt my self-command giving way. What can be more trying than to be forcibly fed and then forcibly re-fed for two hours with a draught of musical molasses like that wretched "Méditation" from "Thaïs"? Not even the sight of the hoary, romantic old castle of Drachenfels, perched above the Rhine, allayed my agony. And Johnnie had lured me into this to soothe my nervous system!

I fidgeted. I twitched. I developed incipient homicidal mania. The train stopped at a way station. With my reason tottering on the brink, I sprang convulsively to my feet, shot a glare of fiendish hatred at the lieutenant, and erupted from that compartment with a sense of relief such as must have been experienced by the well-known

> "young monk of Siberia,
> Whose life, it grew wearier and wearier,
> Till he burst from his cell
> With a terrible yell
> And eloped with the mother superior."

Regardless of the absence of cushions and the presence of many peasant women chaperoning geese which struggled out of hampers, I wedged my way into another compartment. At least the geese could not whistle. There I sat, evaporating my discomfiture, and striving to expel from a raw consciousness the loathed strains which the lieutenant had

> "Photographically lined
> On the tablets of my mind."

When I rejoined Johnnie on the platform at Coblenz, his face was wreathed in smiles as though he remembered something amusing.

"What's the matter with you?" I demanded crossly.

My anger threw Johnnie into fits of laughter. He wiped away a furtive tear.

"Do you know," he gasped, "what that whistling disciple of yours said to me and what I said to him?"

"No, of course I don't."

"Well, when you left us like that breakfast food they advertise which is shot out of a gun, the lieutenant looked after you curiously. Then he turned to me and stopped whistling long enough to ask:

"'Say, Captain, what ailed that bird, anyway?'

"I looked him over and sized him up.

"'Why, you see,' I said, 'he's one of those unfortunate people who hate music. Can't go it in any form.'

"'That,' said the lieutenant, 'is a thing I'll never understand. Must be terrible to be that way!'"

CHAPTER XX

A DUET FOR LIFE

AS soon as I left Johnnie's enlivening sphere of influence I was lost in the slough of despond. If I had been King Solomon I would have declared in embittered accents that all was vanity and vexation of spirit. If I had been the Swan of Avon I would have labeled the universe weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. Being me, I could only call life a rotten sell. I saw nothing in the immensely overrated institution. In vain I bade myself buck up and remember that I was returning to the land of the free, sound in wind and limb.

The answer always was:

"What good is that? Priscilla has gone back on me!"

It maddened me to reflect that now, if ever, a member of the A.E.F. ought to be having the time of his life. Starting for home after the Germans had been licked? Why, mere existence ought to be worth a thousand marks a second! And here was I, fishy-eyed and listless. I could not even work up a thrill at thought of the shower-bath fixture!

I spent my force in writing long, pleading letters to Priscilla, begging for a merciful word and giving elaborate directions how to address the envelope. All in vain. Never a line from her. I hated the sight of a piano. The more I pondered my plight, the more clearly I saw that I had fallen to this through having entertained such absurdly high-brow notions about music. If only I had not minded a little piano-pounding, I might have been married to Priscilla long ago. But my case was hopeless. If two years in the American army, which made itself known from end to end of every place it went, by its continuous and cheerful rendition of all the worst tunes, could not cure me, in spite of constant saturation in them, of a hopeless passion for high-brow music, I must be a chronic prig. It was all up with me!

Even the last sight of my dear adopted family failed to resuscitate me as I passed through Paris. Ditto, eight days of waiting around and playing interminable solitaire in the K. of C. hut at "St. Agony." Ditto, a week in the forbidding old Fort Bouguen which had been turned into an embarkation camp outside of Brest, for the purpose of treating homeward-bound warriors like ex-convicts held on suspicion.

In the good, old rustic phrase, there was nothing to "take my mind." When I tried tennis on the rugged, three-dimensional courts behind the Red Cross hut, I could not tell whether I was engaged in tennis or mountain-climbing, and desisted in confusion. I wandered into the A.L.A. library. The very first book I took down from the shelves was Woodrow Wilson's "Washington," and it opened at once to a sentence describing certain persons who were "blockaded in the harbor of Brest." This was too poignant. I cast the volume down in disgust. And from then on, during my stay there, all books looked alike to me. Even solitaire began to pall. And I dared not go to town much for fear of having my name read out for instant embarkation as soon as my back was turned.

It was eleven o'clock on the morning of the eighth day, and I was shuffling the cards for the thousandth time, when an unusual sound made me prick up my ears. A private was calling my name. I beckoned him. He saluted and said, "You're wanted on the 'phone, sir."

Now, I usually can tell, by means of a curious sixth sense, who is calling me before I put the receiver to my ear. But, as I walked over to headquarters, I was completely at a loss. Of late I had been feeling most unsocially inclined. So far as I knew, I did not have a single acquaintance in Brittany.

I put the instrument to my ear and said "Hello."

Not a word came in reply. Instead, there was the sound of music. The tune was vaguely familiar. I began to listen intently. Gracious Heavens! It was the opening strain of that little Gurlitt trio which Priscilla and Bill and I had joined in at our very first meeting, back there in the days when all the world was young. And it was being played on a piano in the one way that Priscilla, and no one else, could play it.

"Priscilla!" I shouted excitedly into the mouthpiece. "Priscilla, my dear, where on earth are you?"

The music ceased, but there was no word.

"My dear," I cried, "speak to me! Where are you? I've got to see you right away, toot sweet!"

Again a sphinx-like silence. It was maddening.

"Well, anyway," I called, "won't you let me know your plans?"

I stopped again and listened eagerly.

There was a slight bumping noise as if the ear-piece were being laid down. Abruptly the unseen piano crashed a few heavy chords, and I recognized them as the opening of a piece called "Ocean, thou Mighty Monster." This ended in mid-career with two chords of great finality. A professor of harmony would have called those two chords a "plagal cadence." Church-goers would have recognized them as the musical equivalent of "Amen."

"But are n't you going to give me a chance? . . ."

There was ever so faint a sound as of a gurgle of soft, mocking laughter; then the unmistakable click of a receiver hanging up. And the line went dead.

The interview seemed definitely at an end.

Frantically I rang up central and demanded where that last call had come from.

"Could n't say, sir," was all the satisfaction I got.

Here was indeed a glorious crisis. Priscilla in town, and in a communicative mood, even though her communications were limited strictly to music. All my zest in the game of life came back with a rush.

Yes, but what was that loud thing she had played when I asked what her plans were?

"Ocean, thou Mighty Monster." Then she must be on the brink of embarking for America. Now, if ever, the time had arrived for action!

I crammed on my cap and dashed for Brest, reckless whether my name would ever be called. I burst into Signal Corps Headquarters, picked out the most intelligent-looking sergeant in sight, drew him aside, and slipped a twenty-franc note into his palm.

"Tell me quick where I'll find an army 'phone in the same room with a piano."

With suspicious suddenness the sergeant's face turned wooden.

"Could n't say, sir."

I drew forth fifty francs.

"No use holding out on me, Sergeant. I've simply got to know."

The set face relaxed into a slow grin.

"If any one should ask you, sir, mind, I ain't told you nothin'. We'd do anythin' to oblige as nice a Y lady as that. Ran the wire in there last night on the strict Q.T."

He scribbled an address on a slip of paper. I was so exalted that I hardly knew what I was doing. I handed him my card with the fifty francs and said: "Hunt me up some day on the other side. If this turns out all right I'd like to do something for you."

In five minutes I was pulling at the bell of an old house set back in a garden on a height overlooking the harbor, where a flock of planes were circling above a bevy of dreadnoughts and transports, symbolizing to my dizzy mind the fact that I was up in the air, but that I now dreaded nought and was in transports. My abstracted eye also registered the blue and white flag of the League of Nations, proudly waving from a former German boat above a large white sign *Waffenstillstand* — the symbol of all we had been fighting to attain. *Waffenstillstand!* Armistice! Was that in store too for Priscilla and me?

I thought it was. Even before I rang, I heard our little old Gurlitt melody being played very softly by some one — I knew whom — in the corner room.

My state of mind robbed me of the power of speech. Without the customary formalities I burst past the frightened *mademoiselle* who opened the door, and in half a dozen strides I was at Priscilla's side.

For one moment she looked as if she wanted to get behind the piano. Then, bless her dear little heart! she looked at me and began to laugh irrepressibly, and a little hysterically.

"I *knew* you'd do it! I said I'd never speak to you again, and I made up my mind not to say a word that would be advances — and then —"

"Never mind the explanations. Of course you knew I'd do it, you little angel!" I had her in my arms by this time, and was occupying the piano stool in the way that had been so familiar, and I hope always will be — the only way that accommodates two persons comfortably on one small stool. Neither of us said much that was coherent for a few minutes. Priscilla was the first to attain intelligent speech.

"To think," she said slowly and convincingly, "that any two people could be such idiots."

"We are n't!" said I.

"Of course we are n't. I mean up to now we have been."

"We certainly have, when I might have been married to you for years and years if it had n't been for the foolish music."

"The dear music," she corrected, tinkling with one hand the childish Gurlitt melody. "No one can ever persuade me that that is n't the finest tune in the world."

A disturbing thought came into my mind.

"Yes, dear, but what was that you were playing about the mighty monster?"

She glanced at my wrist watch and gave a little scream of dismay.

"Oh, dear! You had quite driven it out of my head. My orders are to sail on the Leviathan in two hours."

My heart sank. Priscilla and I seemed fated never to come together without being torn apart by violence. It might be weeks now before I could get away from this hole of a Brest and follow her.

Priscilla slid from my knee.

"It's too awful, but I have n't a minute to lose now. I must get my things together and go. Anyway," she added bravely, "we're sure to meet soon over there, and now we've made up it won't be so bad."

Our lips met for the last time in God alone knew how long.

Just then the telephone on the piano rang violently. Priscilla answered, then held it out toward me with a look of perplexity.

"It must be for you. But how in the world —"

"Hello, Lieutenant," the voice said. "This is the sergeant over to Signal Corps Headquarters. Got a little inside dope for you. You see, we guys is in the know on most everything that goes on. You'd better beat it back to the Fort. I just seed yer name on a list of sailing orders that's on the way out there now."

Blest messenger of love! My heart beat high with a wild hope.

"Thank you, Sergeant. Did you notice the name of the boat I drew?"

"Yes, sir. The Leviathan. Sails in two hours."

"Bully for you, Sergeant. Don't forget to hunt me up."

"Sure. One thing more, sir." There was more than the hint of a broad grin in his voice. "There's something like a dozen chaplains slated fer that there boat."

I hung up violently.

"Priscilla!" I cried, lifting her off her feet. "Glory hallelujah! I'm sailing with you! Would you mind being married by an army chaplain on the bosom of the mighty monster?"

"You're going altogether too fast," she said. "For goodness' sake, run away now and let me pack!"

We had packed and we were on board, and we had found each other again and it was moonlight, and there was actually a place by the port rail where we could watch the moon and the receding shores of France in comparative solitude. My arm was around Priscilla's waist — naturally. And naturally we were going over the long trail that it had been necessary for us to take before we had found each other.

"Was n't it the most gloriously improbable piece of fiddler's luck in the world," I demanded, "that after I'd made such a fool of myself about the way you played when we were kids, I should find you down there in Nice? And was n't it a miraculous piece more that, after I'd spent my time longing for you and writing booksful of letters to you which you never got — you should be in Brest when I was? And was n't it superlatively, magnificently wonderful that you should know I was there and play tunes down the telephone to me? Luck! Can you deny it, Priscilla, darling?"

Priscilla looked at me out of the corners of those dear blue eyes of hers. There came a little twitch at the corners of her mouth, and I knew that her sense of humor was going to get the better of her dignity, as it always had at blessed intervals.

"You might call it fiddler's luck," she said thoughtfully, "and then again, you might n't. Unless you call it luck to have me awfully in love with you."

"You darling! The greatest luck on earth! But just what do you mean?"

"You see," said Priscilla, in the manner of one who takes the plunge, "that first time, when we were children, after I'd got over hating you for being such a prig about the way I played — and you were, you know you were —"

"I was, indeed!" said I with conviction. "I acknowledge it freely. Well?"

"After I was n't angry any more, I saw that there might be something in what you'd said. So I practiced very, very hard for years after that. I'd thought I was such a fine player, and you told me I was n't. Things hurt terrifically when you're a flapper. But I always had it ahead of me that some day I'd meet you again and play — *beautifully!* And you'd be sorry. So it was you, really, that made me play well — if I do. And you know the standards of the Y were very lofty for my special stunt. If you had n't said those horrid things long ago, I'd never have been in France to meet you. That was n't luck; it was you, you see."

"But our being in Nice together," I argued; "you can't say that was n't luck from on high."

"I'm very foolish to deny it, I suppose. But I always want to tell you the truth, dear. I — I saw your name in the casualty lists. So I pulled all the wires in the world to get sent to Nice. I knew it was the principal place where American officers came to convalesce. I — I planned it. And when you wrote me you were to sail from Brest, why, I'm afraid I planned that too."

Her head dropped and she looked steadfastly away from me.

"I'm a bold, forward girl, and you'll have it to remember against me. But I'd always remembered, and I hoped you had, and I — well, I just thought I'd see. . . . That was why I was so angry at you, and so easily. I was really angry at myself, you see, for running after you — because cats would call it that. Even un-cats might. So I took it out of you, dear. That's why I'm telling you. I — I'm sorry. But you see it really was n't luck after all."

"Was n't luck?" said I, gathering her up bodily in spite of the danger of lurking fellow passengers. "It was and always will be the biggest piece of fiddler's luck in the world!"

THE END

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